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*The Spirit of the Gospel neither a Spirit of
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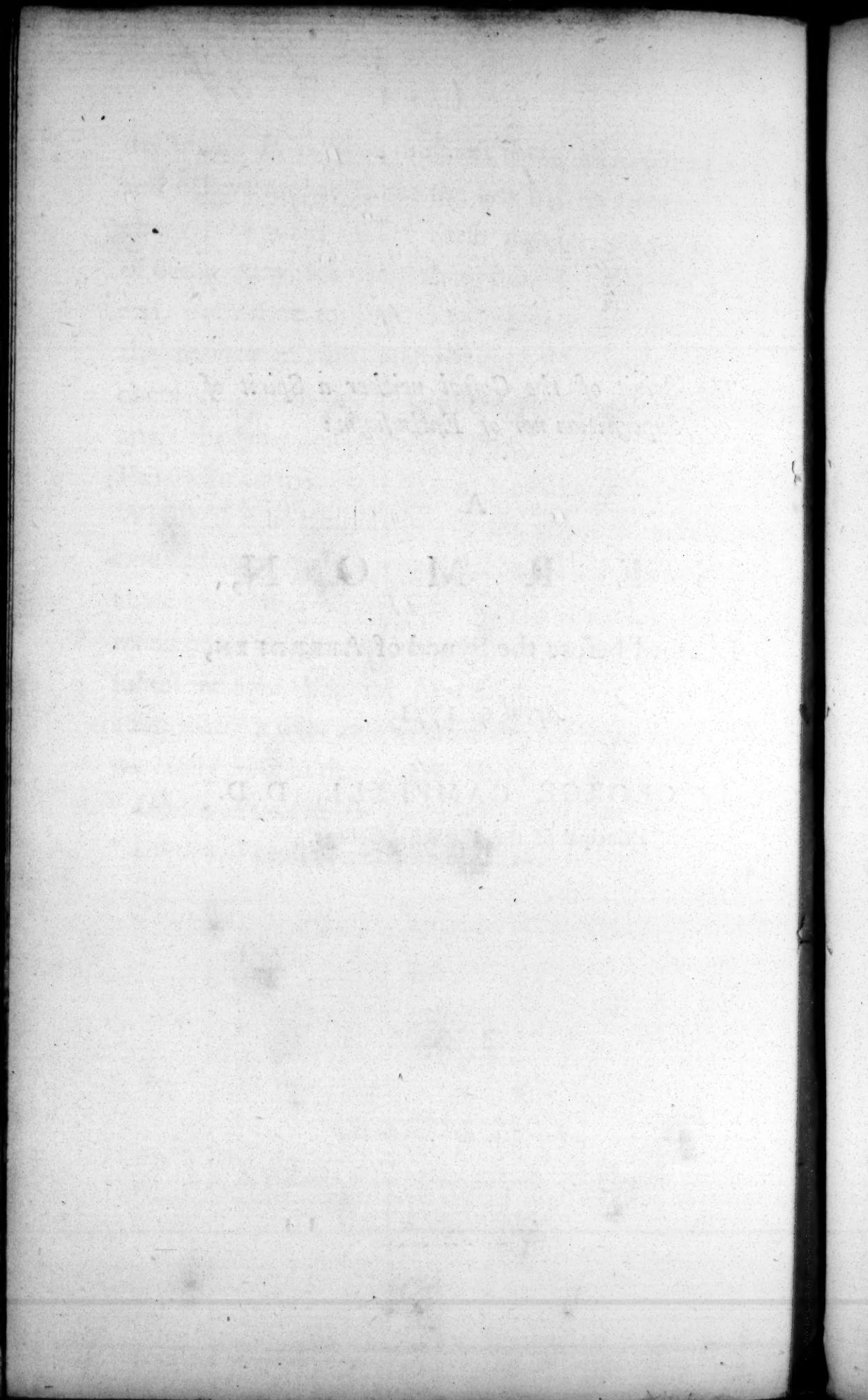
S E R M O N,

Preached before the Synod of ABERDEEN,

April 9. 1771,

By GEORGE CAMPBELL, D. D.

Principal of the Marischal College.



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Printed at the desire of the Synod,

EDINBURGH :

Printed for A. KINCAID & W. CREECH.

MDCCLXXI.

ГОСТИНИЦА
САНКТ-ПЕТЕРБУРГА
СОЛНЦЕВЪ

САНКТ-ПЕТЕРБУРГЪ

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Информация о борьбе с вредонос-

ческими насекомыми

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S E R M O N.

2 TIM. i. 7.

GOD HATH NOT GIVEN US THE SPIRIT
OF FEAR; BUT OF POWER, AND OF
LOVE, AND OF A SOUND MIND.

THERE are two ways in which we may be profitably employed, in considering at large the religious institution of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our inquiries may be directed either to the proofs by which it is supported, or to the spirit which it breathes. In the former, by the discovery of the truth of our religion, it is rendered the object of our faith; in the latter, by the contemplation of its beauty, it becomes more immediately the object of our love.

I say, more immediately; because, tho' this is the direct, it is not the only consequence of such a contemplation. As

A Christianity

Christianity claims to be of heavenly extraction, it is reasonable to expect that it should bear some resemblance to the original from which it springs. The lineaments of goodness and wisdom, of majesty and grace, may be justly looked for in the offspring of the Father in heaven, who is unerringly wise, and infinitely good, the source and the standard of all excellence: and if these lineaments are discovered, they are no inconsiderable evidence of the justice of the claim. Between the child and the parent, there will sometimes be found so striking a likeness, as will be sufficient to convey to a discerning spectator, a stronger conviction of the relation subsisting between them, than could be effected by any other kind of proof. Whatever therefore tends to exhibit our religion as amiable, is, in fact, an intrinsic evidence of its truth; and consequently tends as really, though not so directly, to render it credible, as arguments deduced from prophecy or miracles. Add to this, that the attacks of infidels are as often levelled against the internal character, as against the external evidence of revelation. The vindication of the first is therefore as necessary

necessary for subverting the cause of infidelity, as the illustration of the second.

Besides, it is not barely by being believed, (though that is a most important point), that religion produceth its effect on the mind. *The devils believe, and tremble* *. Their faith, so far from conducing to their happiness, becomes an instrument of their misery. They hate the doctrine which they cannot avoid believing, We must possess the love as well as the belief of the truth, if we would be saved by it †. For this reason it is assigned as the grand criterion of that faith which is available in God's account, that it is a *faith which worketh by love* ‡. Every other criterion is but the result of this. It is solely in consequence of this, that it sanctifieth ||, purifying the heart +, and giving the mind a victory over the world ++.

It also merits our attention, that where love is wanting, it cannot be expected that belief should be durable. Religion is an object that can scarce be viewed by any human creature with indifference. If it fails to kindle affection in the soul, it will

* James ii. 19. † 2 Thess. ii. 10. ‡ Gal. v. 6.

|| John xvii. 17. 19. +- Acts xv. 9. +- 1 John v. 4.

not fail to awaken dread, which commonly associates with aversion. Now it is the general bent of our nature to disbelieve what we dislike. How easy is the task of the declaimer or the witling, when he is employed in decrying or ridiculing tenets which his hearers wish to be false? The Apostle Paul acquaints us, that the lying wonders, and other deceitful arts to be practised by the man of sin in seducing the disciples of Christ, would prove successful only among those who harbour not the love of the truth *.

If therefore the religion of Jesus, on such an examination of its spirit as we now propose, shall appear to be altogether lovely, we have ground to hope, that, with the blessing of God, our faith itself will be strengthened, our love, that animating principle of obedience †, without which faith is unprofitable and dead ‡, will be inflamed, and our perseverance more effectually secured.

Nor will it, I hope, be thought by any that the subject is unsuitable, either to the occasion or to the audience. It would be difficult to imagine an occasion, on which

* 2 Thess. ii. 10. † Rom. xiii. 10. ‡ Jam. ii. 14. 17.
the

the spirit of the gospel would be an improper topic for a sermon : and as to the audience, I have too high a respect for my fathers and brethren present, not to be persuaded, that they are as deeply sensible as I myself am, that we all stand in need of the same means and assistances, for producing, advancing, and securing, our faith, love, and perseverance, that even the meanest of our hearers stand in need of. And if the same helps are equally necessary to us on our own account, they are of more importance on the account of others. To us the ministry of reconciliation is intrusted *: as Christian pastors we are honoured to be the ordinary instruments of conveying the knowledge and the temper of religion to the people. That we may reflect light on others, we must ourselves be previously enlightened; that we may be fitted for infusing into the hearts of our hearers the spirit of the gospel, we need first to experience its influence on our own. In order then to prove successful helpers of the faith and joy of our fellow Christians, as by our office we are bound to be †, one useful ex-

* 2 Cor. v. 18. 19.

† Rom. x. 17.; 2 Cor. i. 24.

pedient doubtless is, to prove faithful assistants and monitors to one another. The sketch that I propose to give, considering the dignity of the subject, must, I know, have many imperfections. But I will not injure my Reverend auditors by an apology; or once suppose, that what I have to offer on such a subject will not be heard with patience, and weighed with candour.

THE words of Paul to Timothy, now read in your hearing, shall serve as the foundation of this discourse: *God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.* On this subject I propose, my brethren, with the assistance of Heaven, *first*, To premise a few things for ascertaining the import of the expressions used by the Apostle;—*secondly*, To inquire into the spirit of false religion, as here denominated *the spirit of fear*, and as standing in opposition to the character given of the true;—*thirdly*, To inquire into the spirit of true religion, here styled *the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind*; showing, as I proceed, that with the greatest justice this character is

is ascribed to the religion of Christ;—
and to conclude with some reflections.

I. IN the *first* place, I premise a few things in order to ascertain the meaning of the Apostle's words, particularly of the term *spirit*, as used in my text.

Is it necessary to observe, that by the *spirit* is often meant in the New Testament the Holy Ghost, the third of the sacred Three in whose name we are by baptism initiated into the Christian communion; and that when any of the disciples of Jesus are said in scripture to receive the *Spirit*, it is always meant, that by the operation of that divine person on their minds, they obtain either the more ordinary graces of faith, hope, and charity, which are essential to the Christian life; or the more extraordinary, the power of working miracles, of prophecy, of speaking strange languages, and other suchlike? These gifts the wisdom of God thought fit to bestow in the early times of Christianity, that by means of such incontestable evidences of its divinity, its doctrine might be more quickly propagated in the world. But as they were intended solely

for

for answering a particular and temporary purpose, they were but circumstantial and temporary. When once the end was effected, there was no further occasion for the means. Accordingly they have long since ceased in the church of Christ. Whereas the first mentioned, though more common in the dispensation, yet being of the essence of his religion, and therefore more excellent in their nature, must continue whilst he hath followers on the earth.

Some have thought, that by the words of my text the Apostle intended to signify the spiritual gifts last enumerated, the extraordinary and miraculous; and it must be acknowledged, that the word *power* is often employed in scripture to denote, by way of eminence, the power of working miracles. But that this is not the meaning of the term in the passage before us, will appear from the following considerations. *First*, The original word in this verse rendered *power*, is also often used by this Apostle to signify the virtues of self-government*. *Secondly*, Power is here coupled with love, and with a sound mind; two qualities which are never

* 1 Cor. iv. 19.; Eph. iii. 16.; Col. i. 11.

ranked among the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost. *Thirdly*, The spirit of power stands here in opposition to the spirit of fear, which manifestly denotes an habitual disposition or temper of soul. From all these it is abundantly evident, that, in this place, the inspired penman intended, if I may so express myself, to delineate the principal features of the Christian character. Accordingly the word *spirit* may very reasonably be understood to denote a prevailing disposition of soul. This disposition he exhibits to us as the badge of our religious profession, as the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord : *God hath not given us, us the believers in Jesus, distinguished alike by this faith from Jews and Gentiles, the spirit of fear; but he hath given us the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*

The same term is frequently, in the language of holy writ, and even in common language, employed to denote both cause and effect. Thus the luminary itself, and the rays issuing from it, we indiscriminately denominate *light* : and that in scripture-idiom the word *spirit* often signifies an habitual frame or temper is

undeniable. In this way it behoves us to understand these phrases, *the spirit of meekness, the spirit of slumber, the spirit of jealousy*, and many others, which frequently occur in sacred writ. We are therefore to conceive the Apostle as exhibiting here the outline of the Christian character, as describing in brief that temper of soul which the religion of Jesus is so admirably fitted to inspire into those who by faith receive it. This temper, this internal signature of genuine Christianity, I shall in the sequel, for distinction's sake, denominate *the spirit of the gospel*. It is the same which, in the New Testament, is sometimes called *the spirit of Christ*, and sometimes *the spirit of adoption, or sonship* *.

Need I add, that by such expressions are not meant either the doctrines of our religion, or its moral precepts, considered severally, its promises or its threatenings, its positive institutions, or the examples of virtue which it holds up to our imitation; but that temper of mind which is the result of these; that character which all the branches of Christianity, each in the way

* Rom. viii. 9. 15. ; Gal. iv. 6.

suited to its particular nature, conspire to produce in the soul of the believer, or, which is the same thing, in that person on whom this religion hath its proper influence.

So much for ascertaining the import of the words.

II. I proceed, as I proposed, in the *second* place, To inquire into the spirit of false religion, as here characterized *a spirit of fear*, and as standing in opposition to the character given of the true.

It hath been long a common artifice of atheistical and infidel authors, industriously to confound, in their writings, the words *religion* and *superstition*, as though they were synonymous. A few indeed of late, more refined in their notions on this subject than their predecessors, observing, that into the character of religionists of different denominations, there entered very different, nay contrary principles, have nicely distinguished between these two kinds of false religion, *superstition* and *enthusiasm*; which, though in some respects opposite in their nature and tendency, agree in this, that each lays claim to the

appellation of religion. Hence those writers have taken occasion to consider every thing that comes under this name, as a particular mode of one or other, or a certain combination of both.

That there is a foundation in nature for the distinction which hath been made between these extremes, is not to be denied; but that religion, properly so called, though it hath been often, through the ignorance and corruption of men, blended with these, is in its nature totally distinct from both, and participates of neither, I hope in the sequel fully to evince.

For this purpose I am previously to consider the spirit of false religion. Its character may be learned from my text, both from what is directly ascribed to it, and from what is insinuated concerning it. *First;* The Apostle here ascribes to it, that it enfeebles and intimidates the soul. When Paul expressed himself in this manner, *God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind,* it is manifest, that he meant to mark the difference, in respect of its influence on the temper, to be found in that sublime doctrine which he taught, as well from

every

every possible species of false religion, as from the Judaism that then obtained amongst his countrymen, and from the various forms of polytheism that prevailed in the rest of the world.

Terror then, or unaccountable and unbounded fear, is one of the commonest, and at the same time one of the ugliest features in false religion. If I might be indulged a little in criticising on the Apostle's expression, I would remark, that the original word, which in my text is rendered *fear*, occurs no where else in the New Testament *. It doth not signify simply the passion of fear, or any particular exertion of that passion; but it is one of those terms that are always employed in a bad sense, and serve to denote something vicious in the mental habit, which, uncontrouled by an enlightened conscience, fosters passion into disease.

There is a fear that is reasonable and proper; there is a fear that is unreasonable and weak. None of the appetites or affections belonging to human nature are evil in themselves. A little reflection will satisfy the attentive inquirer,

* The word is *δελια*. Its conjugates, *δελος*, and *δελιω*, occur sometimes in the New Testament; but always in a bad sense.

that

that they are all admirably calculated to promote the welfare, both of the individual, and of the species. But then it was the purpose of Heaven, we even read it in our frame, that all the inferior powers of the soul should be informed by reason, and controuled by conscience. The evil then only takes place, when the passion, emancipating itself, and disdaining all restraint and controul, is directed towards an improper object, or cherished in an undue degree. It is this which is in scripture aptly styled, *inordinate affection*. The passion of fear was implanted in our mind to rouse us on the approach of danger. The intention evidently was, that we may be stimulated timely to avoid it, when to avoid it is both possible and lawful; and, when otherwise, that we may be suitably prepared to encounter it. It is not in the want of fear, or a lively sense of danger, that true fortitude consists. On the contrary, were we destitute of the passion, we should be incapable of the virtue. No person would call it courage, in an infant, or a blind man, to move with unconcern on the summit of a precipice. Their unconcern would arise, not from strength of mind,

mind, or any positive quality, but from a defect, ignorance and blindness. It is not therefore in the extinction of fear that magnanimity consists. That man is, in the best sense of the word, magnanimous, in whom fear habitually waits the information of reason, and stoops to the command of duty.

Nor is fear to be excluded altogether from the precincts of religion. If the supreme Lord of the universe is to be considered as a lawgiver, there must be danger in violating his laws. To affirm that there is none, and that the observance and the transgression are alike in their consequences, is to annihilate the very notion of a law. It is giving and refusing to God the character of lawgiver with the same breath. A soul then conscious of the violation, and yet not susceptible of the passion, would as manifestly labour under a defect, as the blind man or infant in the case supposed. One of the greatest motives to reformation and future vigilance would in such a character be totally wanting. If a reverence for the laws of our country, and when one is tempted to transgress, a fear of incurring their sanction, be qualities

lities essential in a good citizen, a reverence for the laws of our nature, and an awe of his sentence who is the righteous judge of the world, are no less essential in a good man. The fear of God then, thus understood and qualified, is not only irreproachable, but even incumbent on creatures so constituted and so situated as we are, conscious of sin and frailty, and daily exposed to temptation. It is with reason therefore that it is so often inculcated in sacred writ.

It is true, we are there informed, that *perfect love casteth out fear.** But it ought to be remembered, that perfect love also casteth out sin. For *love*, we are told, *is the fulfilling of the law* †; and the whole of the divine commandments are summed up by our Saviour in the love of God, and the love of our neighbour ‡. For this reason, fear, which implies an apprehension of danger, can never be incumbent on those who, like the holy angels, are in absolute security. Hence we discover what is the great foundation of religious fear in a rational being, such as man. It is the consciousness of guilt, or moral evil, by

* 1 John iv. 18. † Rom. xiii. 10. ‡ Matth. xxii. 35. &c.
violating

violating the law of his nature, which is the law of God. And the reason that this fear is enjoined on men as a duty is, that it may serve the upright as a guard to their integrity, and the corrupt as a monitor to repentance. As from the former observation we discover the grounds of pious fear, from that now made we perceive its use and influence; and, by means of both, we are enabled to distinguish it from all superstitious terrors whatsoever, and consequently from that spirit of timidity, which, by the Apostle's account, is so far from being the spirit of the gospel, that it is a perfect contrast to it.

The panics of superstition often arise unaccountably, at least from no adequate cause; and always tend to what is insignificant, if not pernicious. The cause is often inadequate. An eclipse of the sun, or an uncommon appearance in the sky, hath struck whole nations with amazement and terror. From the like blind apprehensions have sprung the absurd doctrine of omens, and the illusive arts, now justly exploded, of augury, astrology, and divination. Even when there is a real

C cause

cause of fear, the effect often (if any thing on so serious a subject ought to excite laughter) we should call ridiculous. A late author observes, That " when the old Romans were attacked with a pestilence, they never ascribed their sufferings to their vices, or dream'd of repentance and amendment. They never thought that they were the general robbers of the world, whose ambition and avarice made desolate the earth, and reduced opulent nations to want and beggary. They only created a dictator in order to drive a nail into a door, and by that means they thought that they had sufficiently appeased their incensed deity *." This is in the true genius of superstition. The fears of the people are alarmed by a general calamity. At once ignorant, timid, and credulous, they will admit any thing as the cause of their suffering, and will recur to any thing as an expedient for relieving them, which the knavery or the folly of those who have their confidence shall suggest. It is so far lucky when nothing more hurtful is suggested, than the driving of a

* Natural History of Religion. XIV.

nail into a door. Sometimes this ignoble principle leads the infatuated worshippers to seek to propitiate their divinity by exercising cruelty on themselves. Thus it was the manner of Baal's prophets to cut themselves with knives and lancets *. Sometimes, which is worse, it leads them to exercise cruelty on others. From this baneful origin have arisen the most shocking and bloody tragedies that ever disgraced the annals of mankind. What crimes hath not Superstition sanctified in the eyes of her blinded votaries! Hence human sacrifices and holy wars. Hence perfidies and massacres. Hence private assassinations and public persecutions.

It must be confessed, that it hath not been amongst idolatrous nations only that this spirit hath been found. We learn from the complaints of the prophets, that it had great influence on the minds even of the chosen people. They had but too strong a propensity to imagine, that for the most atrocious crimes they could atone, by numerous and costly victims. Nor did they immolate these, agreeably to the intention of their law, as symboli-

* 1 Kings xviii. 28.

cal expressions of gratitude or of penitence, and as engagements to reformation; but as a proper equivalent for benefits received, and satisfaction for sins committed, and consequently as a full discharge of all the debts they owed to divine justice. For this reason the prophet Asaph introduceth Jehovah expostulating with them on the grossness and absurdity of their sentiments. They acted precisely as though they could enrich with their gifts the Lord of the universe, or supply a want in him who being all-sufficient stands in need of nothing. *If I were hungry, faith God, I would not tell thee; for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?** He acquaints them, on the contrary, that as long as they continued insensible and impenitent, the very oblations they offered, served but to aggravate their guilt. *To the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?*† In the same spirit the prophet Isaiah assures the people, that it is in vain they recur to burnt-offerings, and the other solemnities

* Psal. l. 12. 13.

† Psal. l. 16.

of their worship, whilst avarice, injustice, oppression, inhumanity, continued to prevail among them. *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord.* — *Who hath required this at your hand to tread my courts?* Bring no more vain oblations *. To show, after all, that the prophet did not mean to drive them to despondency, but to call them to repentance, he concludes, *Put away the evil of your doings; cease to do evil, learn to do well, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow* †.

We shall afterwards have occasion to observe, that many who have been more highly favoured than even Israel was, and more fully enlightened by the celestial beams of divine truth, have not escaped incurring the same imputation. But alas! my brethren, it is a just, though melancholy reflection, that it is not in the conduct or the dogmas of those who call themselves Christian; or, to adopt our Saviour's phrase, who say to him, *Lord, Lord* ‡, that we are to look for the spirit of the gospel: but it is in what we learn from this sacred volume; it is in the lives

* If. i. 11. 12. 13. † If. i. 16. 17. ‡ Matth. vii. 21.

of Christ and his apostles; it is in the doctrine they taught, the maxims they inculcated, the motives they urged, the institutions they established.

From what hath been said, it follows, that there are two principal characteristics of the dread infused by superstition that clearly distinguish it from that reverential fear which true religion demands of us. The first is in the cause; ignorance, or rather misapprehensions, of God, and a perversion of the sense of right and wrong: the second is in the effect; something frivolous at best, often flagitious. In either case, even in that which to a superficial view may appear quite harmless, the tendency is plainly to lull the conscience, and give security in sin. The spirit of superstition is in scripture very properly termed *a spirit of bondage* *. Through this medium the divine being appears to the worshippers as a capricious and tyrannical master to his wretched slaves. They will not say so; perhaps they will not believe that they think so: but their latent sentiments belie their professions, and evince, that when they use a different language, they but

* Rom. viii. 15.

flatter him with their tongue. If it is true of the love which animates the perfect, that it excludeth fear, it is equally true of the fear which awes the superstitious, that it excludeth love. For this reason it hath been justly observed of superstition, that whatever be the outward appearance it assumes, there is always more or less of *demonism* at bottom.

Diametrically opposite in both respects, in cause and effect, is the fear of the religious. It is founded in a veneration of the perfections and moral government of God, and in a sense of human frailty and depravity. Its tendency is, to produce vigilance for the preservation and improvement of whatever is praise-worthy in the character, and for the reformation of whatever is amiss. That the superstitious should be misled by the same errors and grossness of imagination in fixing on the remedy, that they were misled by in accounting for the cause of the horrors raised in their minds, is by no means to be wondered at: but that any person of discernment should not perceive, or any person of impartiality should not acknowledge, the difference in this respect be-

engaged
tween

tween the spirit of religion, and the spirit of superstition, is indeed wonderful. An atheist who admits the distinction between moral good and ill, (and this he may admit, as well as the distinction between beauty and deformity), must be sensible of the difference now pointed out: he must be sensible, that the aspect of the demon Superstition is not more malignant, than that of the cherub Religion is friendly, to society.

But it is not by this horrid feature only that false religion is distinguished from the true. The Apostle, by contrasting it with the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind, suggesteth to us, that in the counterfeit there is always weakness, in conjunction often with malevolence, and sometimes even with a species of insanity.

From what hath been said, it is evident, that the terrors of superstition imply weakness or imbecillity of mind; as they arise from ignorance of God, and of one's self, a vitiated understanding, frequently accompanied with a perverted conscience. But the same cause produceth different effects on the temper, as it happens

happens to be differently allied. In the apprehensive and timorous, the effect is *Superstition*; in the arrogant and daring, it is *Enthusiasm*. *Ignorance* is the mother of both by different fathers. The second she had by *Presumption*, the first by *Fear*. Hence that wonderful mixture of contrariety and resemblance in the characters of the children. There have been times, and there are places, in which some of the priesthood have maintained, that ignorance is the mother of devotion. Have not such unwarily betrayed by this adage, to what family their devotion belongs? Can it be related to that religion wherein the knowledge of God is of more account than burnt-offerings *? We must own indeed, that its affinity to that worship which Pagan Athens anciently paid to the unknown God †, cannot reasonably be disputed.

Further, it was remarked, that a degree of malevolence often enters into the composition of false religion. It is natural to suppose, that the temper of the adorers will take a tincture from the character they ascribe to the divinity they adore.

* Hos. vi. 6.

† Acts xvii. 23.

The more powerful and the more perfect in other respects he is conceived to be, the greater is the influence which the moral dispositions they attribute to him will have upon their own. Nor are we to judge of those dispositions by the terms in which the devotees speak of their deity, but by the actions and conduct which they impute to him, and by the sentiments wherewith they themselves are affected. As it hath been observed of false religion, that it is founded on injurious apprehensions of the divine nature; so in superstition, particularly where the terrible predominates, these must imply a considerable share of malignity. And it merits our attention, that, in this respect, the errors of those who maintain the unity of the god-head, are more pernicious than even the absurdities of polytheists, in that they have a greater influence on the temper of the votaries. With the latter, the characters of the gods, like human characters, are avowedly a mixture of good qualities and of bad; with the former, the deity, in whatever colours they actually paint him, must still be celebrated as the pattern of excellence. Consequently, to be similarly affected

affected with him, to hate those whom they suppose his enemies, and whom he hates, will be regarded by the worshippers even as a duty; and a duty so much the more meritorious, the stronger their obligations are, on other accounts, to love them. And from hating to exterminating, when that is practicable, the transition, as fatal experience hath shown, is not difficult.

But however different in some respects the character of the enthusiast is supposed to be, there will be found, on examination, a stronger likeness in this very article than could at first be imagined. Nothing indeed can be more opposite than hope and fear, presumption and timidity; yet nothing can be more like than some of the consequences of these upon society. The fanatic considers himself as Heaven's favourite; and believes this to be either his peculiar prerogative, or, if he is not quite so far gone, to be at least a privilege he enjoys in common with a few. Hence a contempt of the far greater part of his species: and as those of this stamp are ever ready to canonize their own wildest reveries as divine illuminations, and to consider their

own decisions as the oracles of God ; on finding that they are not implicitly received as such by others, their pride instantly takes the alarm. And what shall serve to restrain its fury, when conscience and religion, the natural checks of passion, are corrupted and silenced ? nay, which is worse, when false religion, and a misinformed conscience, are made to declare in its favour ? Opposition then is branded with the name of impiety, and contradiction with that of blasphemy. Their own revenge, on the contrary, they dignify with the title of zeal ; and malice against the person of an antagonist, they call love to his soul.

As to the last criterion mentioned, which stands opposed to *a sound mind*, it but too manifestly results, both in the superstitious and in the enthusiastic, from the other criteria already mentioned. By both are the dictates of common sense and the admonitions of conscience alike vilified and neglected. These, as merely human, and therefore fallacious guides, are superseded, in the one, by the most frivolous observances, which an authority that he calls venerable, or immemorial custom,

custom, hath imposed; and in the other, by the extravagancies of a heated brain. The symptoms of distemper are indeed different in the two characters. The superstitious person more resembles the idiot, and the enthusiast the madman. But as it will be allowed, that idiocy and madness are more nearly related to each other than either is to a sound mind; so the two species of false religion mentioned (however much they may be regarded as extremes) are more nearly connected with one another, than either is with that religion which alone merits the denomination of the true.

What hath been advanced with regard to superstition, will be readily admitted by all who are ever so little acquainted with the history of the world. As to what hath been said of enthusiasm, it may appear more doubtful. Its most extravagant flights are much rarer; and tho' its fervours are more violent while they last, they are extremely transient; and unless persecution minister fuel, they subside of themselves, and die away. Yet the effects of its rage have been too frequent not to vouch the truth of what hath been affirmed.

affirmed. On the other hand, nothing is more inveterate than superstition. It insinuates itself silently and slowly; but is cruelly tenacious of its hold, and consequently by far the more dangerous of the two.

I shall only add, that it is not every mistake, even in regard to the divine nature, which can with propriety be denominated either superstitious or fanatical; though every mistake on this subject is doubtless of dangerous tendency in religion. But those errors only can be so denominated, which affect the moral attributes and government of God, which confound the natural distinctions of right and wrong, which inspire confidence where there is no ground of hope, or terror where there is no cause of fear.

So much for an outline of the character of both sorts of false religion, superstition and enthusiasm.

III. I come now, in the *third* place, to inquire into the character of true religion, which is delineated in my text as a spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind: of power, implying self-command, or
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the due government both of passion and appetite; of love to God and man, which is *the end of the commandment* *, and *the bond of perfectness* †. Each of these I once proposed to consider severally, explaining their nature, clearing them from the misrepresentations which false glosses have introduced, and showing in what manner the religion of Jesu\$ illustrates and enforces them. I had even proceeded some way on this plan: but sensible at last that it was impossible to comprehend the whole in one discourse, I determined to desist, and to satisfy myself with the discussion of the third particular in the character, *a sound mind*. There is one reason at least for entering more minutely into this part of the subject, that it hath been less attended to, and that this inattention hath been the source even of those evils which have affected the other parts of the character.

A sound mind is here opposed to a frantic or disordered imagination, wherein the light of reason is obscured, if not extinguished, by the terrors of superstition, or the arrogance of fanaticism. Nor is

* 1 Tim, i. 5,

† Col, iii. 24,

there

there any lineament whereby True Religion may be more perfectly distinguished from every pretender which falsely assumes her name, than this good sense, or soundness of mind, that gives the finishing to her character.

In what regards the moral maxims of the gospel, and the disposition which they are fitted to inspire, objectors have not found much matter of wrangling. Their consonance to the soundest dictates of the understanding, and the clearest intimations of conscience, is generally admitted. But it will be asked, Can this conformity to reason be affirmed also with regard to the speculative truths with which our religion brings us acquainted? Will the bright doctrines of revelation be found to have any coincidence with the discoveries we can make by the twilight of our natural faculties?

Before we can answer these questions intelligibly, it will be necessary to premise a few things which may contribute to throw light on the subject, and which are but too little minded in discussions of this nature. First, then, let it be remarked, that it is one thing to say, that the discovery

covery of a particular truth is beyond the reach of reason, and another to affirm, that there is in such a tenet a contrariety to reason. Again, let it be observed, that to say there is something in such a proposition above our comprehension, is one thing, and to advance, that such a proposition is absurd, is another. I add one remark more, which is, that the far greater part of the natural knowledge with which a man of science is acquainted, he neither did derive, nor by any exertion whatever could derive, from his mental powers; but that he hath gotten it by information from without; and that the only legitimate application of the intellectual faculty was, to enable him to apprehend the facts, and canvass the evidence.

I shall not enter into a separate discussion of the above observations; but shall take notice of some things which may serve at once to satisfy us of their truth, and to assist us in applying them. The history of past ages we derive solely from testimony. Our knowledge of countries which we never saw, and the much greater part of natural history, must proceed to us entirely from the same source. It will be

E admitted,

admitted, that on these topics, without such extraneous information, a man of the most enlightened reason, and the most acute discernment, could never investigate aught beyond the sphere of his corporeal senses. If then we receive from a book pretending to contain a divine revelation, the account of what happened in a period preceding the date of civil history, can it be justly sustained as an objection to the veracity of the writer, that he unravels a series of facts, which, by no use or improvement of reason, it would have been in our power to discover? This identical objection would operate equally against all the histories, natural or civil, foreign or domestic, and travels and voyages, that ever were, or ever will be in the world. Nor is this reasoning applicable only to such events as the creation, the fall, and the deluge. Its application to the discoveries revelation brings concerning the designs of Heaven for our recovery, and final happiness, stands precisely on the same footing.

On the other hand, are we to receive, with an undistinguishing credulity, every report without examination? By no means.

means. We have seen what is not the province of reason, let us now consider what is. An account is brought me of a distant country by one who hath had access to be well informed. Many things he relates appear at first incredible, because unlike every thing I have seen or known. The inhabitants, he tells me, after killing their enemies, make a repast of them; they scruple not to bury the living child with the dead mother, if the infant hath not been weaned before the parent's death; and the children suffer the parents to perish for want, when through age and infirmities they become burdensome*. Such manners, though strange, I should not on reflection pronounce impossible. Who can say, what all the possible consequences are of ignorance, barbarity, revenge, anarchy, and sloth? But if the historian or traveller should inform me, that their laws were founded on moral sentiments the reverse of ours; that it were criminal to speak truth, and meritorious to lie; laudable to break a pro-

* Some of these customs have been ascribed by travellers to some of the wild Americans and Greenlanders. See Crantz, Charlevoix, &c.

mise, and culpable to keep it; that ingratitude were accounted an heroic virtue, and gratitude a detestable vice,—I should not hesitate a moment to pronounce, that no faith whatever were due to his narrative. Society can subsist, notwithstanding many vices, which, through a general depravity of manners, human laws might be too feeble to restrain. But with such laws and maxims as the last mentioned, the existence of society is incompatible. Their effect must be, not to draw men together, but to drive them asunder, and make them flee one another like wild beasts. Again, suppose the relater should acquaint us, that the people of whom he wrote had made some progress in abstract knowledge; but that the axioms on which their sciences were founded, were opposite to ours; that with them, two and three were equal to seven, a part was greater than the whole, and other suchlike. The intuitive discernment we have of the moral absurdity of those, and the natural inconsistency of these positions, is what no evidence could vanquish. On the other hand, the credibility of the facts related is no proof of their truth, though it be

a foundation for inquiry. The next province of reason is, to examine the evidence by which the veracity of the writer is supported.

As to the incomprehensibility, or, to speak with greater precision, the imperfect comprehension of some infallible truths, this holds equally of many of the discoveries of reason as of the informations given us by divine revelation. I know not a clearer deduction from reason than this : “ Something hath existed from eternity.” It is an immediate conclusion from two self-evident principles : “ Something now exists ;” and, “ Whatever begins to exist must have a cause.” Yet what is more incomprehensible than eternal duration, or existence without beginning ? To prevent mistakes, let it be observed further, that there is a difference between saying, that there is something in a doctrine which we cannot perfectly comprehend, and saying, that such a proposition is unintelligible. A sentence which to us is unintelligible we can neither believe nor disbelieve. It is words without meaning. We may, through custom, acquiesce in phrases, and even acquire a sort of reverence

tence for sounds, which we do not understand; a case not at all uncommon; but in such acquiescence, whatever name we give it, there is properly nothing of opinion or belief.

Now to apply what hath been said, it is admitted, that in holy writ, many grand discoveries are made to which human unassisted reason never could have attained, no more than it can attain to the knowledge of the inhabitants of Saturn, or of any other of the planets. The powers of the mind have their limits as well as those of the body. We may as reasonably propose to reach the stars with our finger, as to extend our mental faculties beyond the bounds which Omnipotence hath prescribed to them. It is likewise admitted, that many things are revealed to us, of which we have but an imperfect comprehension. The same holds, as was observed, of many of the discoveries of the light of nature. Almost all that relates to the eternal, infinite, and independent One, may be reckoned of this number. It will be further admitted by the candid, that there are some things in the sacred volume which they do not understand. From the revolutions

lutions that happen in a tract of ages, from the great differences to be found in the notions and customs which obtain in distant regions, from the imperfection of the knowledge which moderns can acquire in ancient languages, difficulties must arise as to the import of things, which were perfectly intelligible to the people to whom they were addressed. Nothing can be clearer from scripture, than that every thing it contains is not given as of equal consequence. Some things are introduced incidentally in illustration of other things, and circumstances trivial in themselves, require to be mentioned for connecting a narration of importance. Perhaps in the prophetical writings it was intended, that many things should not be understood till after their accomplishment. But this we may warrantably affirm, that the great truths which require our faith, and the precepts which demand our obedience, are put in such a variety of lights, and so frequently inculcated, as to leave no reasonable doubt about their meaning.

The only thing therefore that remains for the vindication of the gospel on this article, is, to observe, that it presents us with

with nothing contradictory, either to any speculative truth deducible from reason, or to any moral sentiment which the universal suffrage of mankind shows to have the sanction of conscience. I am not ignorant, that our religion hath been impeached on this head. But is it not manifest, that in this charge, difficulties have been confounded with absurdities, things beyond the investigation of reason with things repugnant to it, and things imperfectly comprehended with things self-contradictory ?

On the other hand, it is not to be dissembled, that the absurd glosses and incoherent comments which have been sometimes made on the sacred text, have given too great scope to the enemies of the faith, for the charge of inconsistency and nonsense. But let accusations of this kind light where they may; it is with the gospel as we find it pure in the fountain, and not as it is but too generally corrupted in the streams, that we are concerned. It hath fared with the institution of Jesus, as it did with that of Moses: Corruptions have been introduced into both from the same source, and the commandments of

God

God have been made of no effect by the traditions of men. Superstition and enthusiasm have gone to work, and conspired in disfiguring the beauty, and destroying the simplicity of the truth as it is in Jesus. Whether men have derived their opinions from the reveries of their own fancy, or imbibed them implicitly from those in whom they confided, they have commonly had recourse to the Bible, not to inquire without prepossession into the doctrine contained there, but to seek for arguments in support of the tenets they had previously adopted.

Hence the many curious expedients by which the gospel, if I may so express myself, hath been put to the torture, to make it speak the various and discordant sentiments of the multifarious and jarring sects into which the Christian world hath been unfortunately split. Every party, one would think, fancies itself possessed of the only key to the heavenly treasure contained in the Bible. Certain it is that every party finds things there which none but themselves can discover. Nevertheless in the general modes of expounding almost all seem to be pretty well agreed.

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The true partisan, of whatever party he be, neglecting the plain declarations of scripture (which are by far the most numerous) as of no moment, recurs chiefly, for the support of his system, to those passages wherein there is some difficulty. Again, when it suits his purpose, renouncing the use of common sense, what the ordinary idioms of language and rules of interpretation require to be understood figuratively, he explains literally ; what, on the contrary, the scope of the context requires to be understood as literal, he explains as figurative. By such ingenious methods, which give so large a field for imagination to range in, he never fails to attain his end. Persons of the most repugnant sentiments make the experiment with equal success. The scripture is neither ambiguous nor obscure ; but mens judgments are pre-engaged ere they examine it. They do not try other teachers by this rule, but this rule by the doctrine of some favourite teacher. They admit it only in the sense it pleases him. Hence it is made the foundation of various systems. But it would be no hard matter to evince, that any performance whatever, the *Alcoran* for example,

example, or the *Mishna*, or the *Sadder*, might be made to support their theories with the same facility.

Where do we now find any attention paid to these important lessons of our Lord? *Be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master*, [leader, guide *], as the word imports], *even Christ, and all ye are brethren*. *And call no man your Father upon the earth: for one is your father which is in heaven*. *Neither be ye called masters: for one is your master, even Christ* †. On the contrary, the Christian world hath gotten many masters and rabbies, fathers and guides, under whom, as their respective leaders and heads, they severally class themselves, and to whose several tribunals in doctrine, we must own, if we speak impartially, they more properly make Christ himself amenable, than them to his.

But whence came originally these deviations from good sense, from that soundness of mind which shines forth in the writings of the apostles and the evange-

* The original word is *καρπυνης*, which hath properly this power. It occurs thrice in the passage quoted, and no where else in the New Testament.

† Mat. xxiii. 8. 9. 10.

lists, and is so rarely found (I may say ne-
ver without some alloy) in the religious
compositions of after ages? One great
spring of this evil was that rage of dog-
matizing which so early showed itself in a
variety of shapes. When the doctrine of
Jesus began to spread through all the states
of Greece, and to make many profelytes
among that ingenious, inquisitive, and
disputatious people, who were then divi-
ded into philosophical sects, it might na-
turally be expected, that converts from
different sects who had not thoroughly
imbibed the spirit of the religion they had
so recently been taught, still retaining a
tincture of their former sentiments in re-
gard to theology and morals, and so warp-
ed from the truth in different ways, would
soon disagree among themselves, concern-
ing the doctrine of that gospel which they
had received. Each would exercise his in-
genuity in giving such a turn to the dicta-
tes of revelation as would make them
appear conformable to his favourite op-
inions, and would conciliate both, where
they appeared to clash. When the rein is
once given to Fancy, she is not easily curbed
even in her wildest excursions. Subtle

and

and inventive heads would be daily publishing their own visions as the oracles of God.

Even in the apostolic age, these seeds of dissension were beginning to spring up. Paul perceived the evil, and having traced the cause, gave warning of the danger. *Beware, says he, lest any man spoil you through philosophy, and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ* *. It is not his view to discourage the pursuit of science, or to dissuade from the study of the works of God, which, by his own testimony †, are one way of leading to the knowledge of their author. But using words according to their acceptation at the time, he alludes to the philosophic systems then in vogue, as is implied in the expression, *after the tradition of men* ‡.

Now what would be the consequences of this presumption on the doctrinal part

* Col. ii. 8.

† Rom. i. 19. 20.

‡ F. Paul in his history of the Council of Trent, b. 2. after relating their decrees on justification, says, very pertinently, “ In che haveva gran parte Aristotele coll’ haver distinto esattamente tutti i generi di cause; a che, se egli non fosse adoperato, noi mancavano di molti articoli di fede.” That synod however hath not been singular in exposing themselves to an imputation of this sort.

of our religion? It cannot be doubted, but that some of the truths of revelation would be explained away to make room for the dreams of visionaries. Thus there were some in the infancy of the church who had so far deviated from the faith, as to affirm, that the resurrection was past already *. Another, and more common consequence, was, to incorporate into the body of Christian doctrine, a number of adventitious tenets, to which it had no affinity, and with which it was very ill fitted to coalesce. This is no doubt that wood, hay, and stubble, which the great instructor of the Gentile world, so often quoted, informs us, that some conceited builders would pile up on the only foundation, Jesus Christ †. A third consequence would be, that men, getting beyond the sphere of human knowledge, would come at last, in their airy flights, to mistake shadows for realities, to substitute signs for ideas, and words for things, fighting with one another about names and phrases to which no precise meaning can be affixed. This is what our apostle warns Timothy to avoid, calling it *pro-*

* 2 Tim. ii. 13.

† 1 Cor. iii. 12.

fane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called *. And in another place, *vain jangling*; and assures us, that those who had *turned aside to it, understood neither what they said, nor whereof they affirmed* †. An evil this, which hath infested the church from the beginning, and but too plainly infests it to this moment.

The two last consequences seem to have arisen from the absurd presumption to which men have ever shown themselves prone, of the all-sufficiency of their own powers. Not satisfied with the naked declarations of holy writ, they must inquire into the manner in which every promise is to be fulfilled, and every effect is to be produced, and every operation is to be conducted. On all these points they have dared to pronounce most dogmatically. Other dogmatists have arisen no less confident in their own abilities, who have entered into the question, and given a contrary decision. Then was kindled the theologic war. The people were divided. Some lifted themselves under one captain, others under another. Each party had

* 1 Tim. vi. 20.; 2 Tim. i. 16.

† 1 Tim. ii. 6. 7.

recourse to scripture as a common magazine for arms wherewith to encounter the adverse party. Each imagined he succeeded in the application, and, confident of his own prowess and ability, each boasted of the victory. In process of time, councils were called to end the strife. Councils thought that it suited their dignity on every question to be decisive; and out of their decision of one question, several others have arisen.

Now, the radical error was the notion, that religion was concerned on a particular side, or that the scripture had said any thing which could serve to decide the point debated. Religion was concerned in the discouragement of such controversies, alike impertinent and presumptuous. But the way which was taken was the surest method possible to give them weight.

Methinks I hear it asked with surprise, Is there any question relative to religion on which the scripture is neutral? I must beg leave to ask in return, Was it the intention of the scripture to render man omniscient? — Are there not many things on every subject which we cannot apprehend? — And are there not particularly on the sublimest

sublimeſt of all ſubjects, the divine operations, certain things which God hath not beene meet to communicate to us, and which, conſequently, it is neither pious nor modeſt in us to inquire into? And if one man is audacious enough to overleap the fence, and enter on interdicted ground, is it for us to be equally impious, and, in order to encounter him, to commit the ſame treſpaſſ? *Secret things, faith Moses, belong to the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed, belong to us, and to our children for ever* *. Our Saviour on every occaſion shows a diſpoſition to check questions of mere curioſity about things beyond our ſphere, the knowledge of which God had reſerved to himſelf†. And are there not questions from which the A- poſtle Paul admoniſheth us to abſtain al- together? *Fooliſh and unedifying ‡ questions avoid, knowing that they do gender ſtrifes* ||.

The Apoſtles example was conformable to his precept. Some in his time began to

* Deut. xxix. 29. † Mat. xviii. 1. &c.; Luke xiii. 23. &c.; Jo. xxi. 21. 22.; Acts i. 6. 7.

‡ *ατυδευτερος* improprieſly rendereſ here by our tranſlators *un- learned*. The word occurs often in the Septuagint, and ſigni- fies *impertinent, uninſtructive*.

|| 2 Tim. ii. 23.

dogmatize on the ministry and mediation of angels, from which they inferred the propriety of worshipping them. As to the inference, he expressly condemns whatever might injure the purity and simplicity of worship. But as to the dogmas on which those teachers founded, does he think it necessary to establish a theory of his own in opposition to theirs, according to the invariable policy of succeeding ages? Does he even so much as say whether their opinions be true or false? He does neither. He only informs us, that they are points in which we have no concern, and of which we have not the means of arriving at the knowledge. *Intruding*, says the Apostle, speaking of a teacher of this stamp, *into those things which he hath not seen.* And what is the cause? Arrogance and self-conceit. *Vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind* *; fondly elated with his own imagined sublime discoveries.

Happy had it been for the church if its rulers had continued to be actuated by that soundness of mind which was so well exemplified, and so warmly recommended, by the first propagators of the faith. A

* Col. ii. 18.

general sense of the futility of such speculations and verbal controversies, and their pernicious tendency in subverting charity, the end of all religion, in promoting contention, the bane of social life, and in exposing the gospel to the derision of unbelievers, as though it were intended solely for a subject of altercation, would have quashed those discussions on their first appearance, and put their authors out of countenance. If any thing could have mortified them, it would have been to find, that they met, I say not with contempt, but pity, instead of admiration; and that by those very means by which they wanted to display a more than ordinary acquaintance with what they termed *the mysteries of religion*, they had only betrayed a more than ordinary ignorance of its spirit.

Heresy, as it is called, or error in points wherein religion is supposed to be concerned, hath been compared to the hydra, a many-headed monster of the poets. In nothing does the comparison hold more closely than in this, that when by the ecclesiastic sword wielded by popes or councils, any of those heads have been struck

G 2 off,

off, at least double the number have sprung up in their room. Agreeably to the warning which had been given *, they have increased to more ungodliness.

Now, if Fanaticism excited the broachers of such impertinencies, Superstition confirmed the attachment of their adherents. The effects were correspondent to the cause. Hear the Apostle as to both. *If any man consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds †.* How far church-history justifies the observation, let every intelligent hearer judge.

But it is not the doctrine of the gospel only that hath been thus vitiated. The same spirit of false religion, the declared enemy of a sound mind or sober reason, began also to infect the morals. What tended only to make men resigned to Heaven, and useful to mankind; what tended but to promote rational piety, temperance,

* 2 Tim. ii. 16.

† 1 Tim. vi. 3. &c.

justice,

justice, and beneficence, was in no estimation at all. Extravagancies, the most marvellous, and the most frantic, such as dishonoured the name of religion, and rendered men worse than useless, were considered as the most sublime attainments in the Christian life.

Religion prohibits our being the slaves of appetite, commands us to subdue sensual desires, and bring the body into subjection to the law of the mind. We must not be the votaries of pleasure, if we would be agreeable to God. The less pleasure then, says Superstition, we admit on any account, and the more pain we inflict on ourselves, we are the more perfect, and the more acceptable to him. Hence vows of abstinence, vows of celibacy, and others of the same kind, by which monks and anchorites seclude themselves from the world, and take a dispensation from discharging duties, which, by the irrevocable law of our nature, every man owes to his fellows. Religion forbids covetousness, restrains anxiety about worldly things, and commands us to seek first the kingdom of God. From the same spirit of interpreting, which pays no regard

to the meaning or purpose of a precept, have sprung vows of poverty, as they are called; or, as they should be called, vows of idleness. As the Pharisees had a commodious expedient for releasing children from the duty they owed their parents, by what had at least the name of a donation to the altar *; so these think they consecrate themselves to God, by swearing solemnly, that they shall be unprofitable to men; rather, indeed, that they shall be public nuisances, lay a tax on the sweat of industry, and intercept the alms held forth by the hand of charity to real indigence. For the gospel acknowledges no poor but those who not only are in want, but whom Providence hath rendered incapable of earning a subsistence to themselves. With regard to others, the maxim is, They that will not work, neither should they eat †.

In such absurdities however we must do them the justice to acknowledge, that they have not been singular. From sacred history we learn, that the votaries both of Baal and of Moloch were actuated by the like principle. Similar penances and austeries are practised at this day by the Maho-

* Matth. xv. 3. &c.; Mark vii. 9. &c.

† 2 Thess. iii. 10.

metan

metan dervises. Nay a much higher pitch of perfection is attained by those Indian mendicants the Fakiers, devotees of the being with the thousand names. And what shall we say of the holy tortures so unmercifully inflicted on their own flesh by the Chinese bonzas, another set of itinerant mendicants, in honour of the god Fo. For him too they con over their rosaries, and make processions and pilgrimages *. Superstition is the same under every denomination. The form and the garb may be different, but the spirit is the same. In every age and every nation it may be easily distinguished by this indelible mark, that it makes the service of its supposed divinity the very reverse of a reasonable service, and consequently of the character which Paul gives us of the service of the true God †.

Another engine of superstition, by

* This Eastern superstition, by the account we have of it from Pere Du Halde, a Jesuit missionary, bears an astonishing resemblance to the corruptions which have been introduced into the Christian church. Both have their invocations, in turning over their beads. But whether the syllables, *O mi to fo*, pronounced by a Chinese, have more or less virtue than the syllables *Iesu Maria* pronounced by a Romanist, let him who thinks a sound mind hath any concern in religion, say.

† Rom. xii. 2.

which she hath tainted the morals of the gospel, is a distinction she hath suggested between the cause of God and the cause of virtue or integrity. These, she artfully insinuates, may, in certain circumstances, be found to clash. When that happens, the latter must be sacrificed to the former. The immorality of the action, considered by itself, is not to be regarded, but the good to which it may be rendered conducive. When immoral actions are employed to promote the interests of religion, the end sanctifies the means, the purity of the motive effaces the crime.

By this accursed casuistry, fraud and perfidy, rebellion, murder, and treason, have been sometimes justified; nay, even canonized. They have been celebrated as a kind of heroism in piety, and a triumph of grace over nature. Where-ever this doctrine hath been learned, it was never learned in the school of Christ. It strikes at the root of both natural and revealed religion, undermines the foundation of the love of God, and subverts all the evidence of the essential difference between good and ill, right and wrong.

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Such maxims seem to have been imputed to the primitive Christians (for what evil was not imputed to them ?) by some of the most rancorous of their foes. The Apostle Paul treats the imputation as a calumny, and speaks of the maxim with abhorrence. *If, says he, in the character of an objector, the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie to his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? and not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say), Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just* *. His opinion on this subject was the same with that of the pious Job, who considered it as a wretched apology for deceit or lying, to say, that it was in the service of God †. In fact, an excuse of this sort is but adding absurdity, not to say blasphemy, to wickedness, and representing purity itself as our corruptor. The cause of God is the cause of universal rectitude: That it must ever continue such, results from the immutability of God. This is the law of our nature, and founded in the moral perfections of its author. This, by the concurrent voice of conscience, and of reve-

* Rom. iii. 7. 8.

† Job. xiii. 7. 8.

lation, we are taught to revere as the invariable rule of our conduct.

Piety and good sense both require, that we leave the direction of events to the superintendence of that all-wise Providence which rules the world, and is constantly employed in educating good from evil. Of the remote consequences of things, we short-sighted creatures are very incompetent judges. Our case would be deplorable indeed, all society must quickly go to wreck, if we had not a directory more explicit than such a foresight to recur to. The dictates of conscience, according to Paul, show the work of God's law written on the heart *. It is the same searching spirit which Solomon aptly calls the candle of the Lord †. The voice of conscience, therefore, is the voice of God; and God cannot contradict himself.

By this monitor I am forbidden to betray a trust. You, who are no doubt a subtle casuist, tell me, 'The present case is particular, and not to be determined by a general rule, which may do very well in ordinary cases. In this individual instance, even treachery is merito-

* Rom. ii. 24. 15.

† Prov. xx. 27.

' rious,

'rious, as it may be made subservient to
 'the cause of religion.' The cause of re-
 ligion! Impossible! Had you said, the
 cause of irreligion, the cause of the devil,
 the father of lies and murder, I could have
 understood you. You resume, 'The in-
 'terest of the church of Christ may be
 'promoted.' That we may understand
 one another, and not fight in the dark,
 permit me, good Sir, to ask a plain que-
 stion, What is the church of Christ? For
 if we recur to the New Testament for an
 explanation, it is no other than the com-
 munity of his faithful disciples, actuated
 by his Spirit; for *if any man have not the
 Spirit of Christ, he is none of his**. I shall
 add one question more, What is the inte-
 rest of this church? In the view which
 our religion gives of it, it is not their
 wealth, or rank, or fame, or even the se-
 curity of their lives and fortunes; but it is
 their advancement in faith and purity.
 Can I, then, by corrupting one of the mem-
 bers, and hazarding the infection of the
 rest, advance the purity of the whole?
 Indeed, if you mean by the church, accor-
 ding to the acceptation of the word with

* Rom. viii. 9.

many, a certain order of men only ; and if you mean by their interest, their lucrative offices, dignity, and power, and the credit of those dogmas on which the whole is founded ; I shall admit, that the cause of the church, in your sense of the word, and the cause of virtue, which is the cause of God, may be as opposite as truth and falsehood, heaven and hell.

‘ But you can quote the best authorities, learned theologues, profound scholars, invincible doctors : You can do more ; you can support your opinion by the rescripts of popes, and precedents taken from the practice of councils.’ To a mind not blinded by superstition, all your authorities signify nothing. On one side is the voice of God ; on the other are the sophisms of weak, corrupt, and interested men. He will reply, *Let God be true, and every man a liar**. ‘ But you are illuminated by the unerring Spirit of God.’ It is not within the compass of possibility, to produce a proof of your claim, which shall counterbalance the evidence I have, that it is contrary to the will of Heaven, to lie, to betray, to murder.

* Rom. iii. 4.

Miracles themselves would not answere your purpose. Reason and scripture both teach me, and it is allowed on all fides, that these cannot be admitted in proof of what is either absurd or impious. Should one work a miracle at noon, in order to prove that it is midnight; could his proof have any other effect but to confound? Before it could convince, all the foundations of belief, and consequently the evidence of its own reality, must be entirely rased.

There are doctrines, then, which are not to be admitted on the authority of pontiffs and councils. An apostle of Christ is our warrant for using a much bolder expression, and saying, there are doctrines, which, though an apostle of Christ, or an angel from heaven, should preach to us, we ought not to receive*. And of this sort, surely, is that which calls evil good, and good evil; which puts darkness for light, and light for darkness; which puts bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter †; which corrupts morality in the fountain, and depraves the discernment that God hath given us of right and wrong. *If the*

* Gal. i, 8,

† If. v. 20.

light

*light which is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness * ?*

I now consider another strong-hold of superstition, the ritual of worship, and the effects which on this article have been produced on the religion of Jesus. If we attend to the Christian institution in its native simplicity, as it appears in the New Testament, nothing can seem in this respect less adapted to furnish a handle to the superstitious. No reverence is inculcated for times or places, no sanctity ascribed to utensils or vestments, no distinction made of aliments, as recommending more or less to the favour of Heaven. Its ceremonies were few and simple, calculated for promoting faith and purity. Ceremonies, however, there must be, in a religion intended for man, who is constituted of a body as well as a soul; the body containing the organs necessary both for conveying information to the soul, and for communicating to others her sensations. Ceremonies also there must be in a religion intended for society, which requires a certain external order wherein men are to join. And to every thing in which men can be

* Matth. vi. 23.

occupied,

occupied, time and place are requisite. The noblest things are capable of being perverted to the vilest purposes: and in the general decline of good sense and charity, folly can never be at a loss for tools to work with, or matter to work upon.

It is difficult to express one's self on this subject with such precision, as not to run the risk of being misunderstood one way or other, and perhaps of misleading the unwary. As the outward institutions are the means devised by infinite wisdom for our improvement in faith and holiness, to deprecate the means, must in effect prove injurious to the end; and a general neglect of them hath but too manifest a tendency to atheism and irreligion. On the other hand, as they are but the means, immoderately to exalt them leads as manifestly to superstition and hypocrisy; and that by bringing men either themselves to substitute the means for the end, or to seek to raise their character by taking the advantage of this error in others. This perhaps, considering the weakness of human nature, is that extreme to which the generality of mankind are most liable. The tendency of the first is the disuse of the means,

means, of the second the abuse of them. As both are subversive of true religion, we ought never, through fear of one extreme, which to us may appear the worst, to permit men unwarned to run into the other. This fear did not deter the prophets under the old dispensation, nor our Saviour and his apostles under the new, from representing things plainly as they were, and particularly from remonstrating in the warmest manner against the superstitious use that was often made of the ordinances of religion. The only sure chart by which the Christian course can be directed, is the truth. We can never safely turn aside from it either to the right hand or to the left.

It is impossible for an unprejudiced mind to examine the gospel with attention, and not perceive, that it is repugnant to its genius to lay any stress on mere externals. Every ceremonial performance, however highly venerated by the people amongst whom our Lord resided, and to whom the gospel was first published, is represented as incapable of recommending the soul to God. God

required

required mercy and not sacrifice *. The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath †. It was not that which went into the mouth that defiled the man ‡. Nor was it their endless ablutions of the body that could purify the conscience ||. It was not the worshipping in the Temple, nor on Mount Gerizzim, that was the thing of consequence ‡‡. The apostles talk in the same strain. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing ++. Meat commendeth us not to God ==. The kingdom of God is not meat and drink **. The Most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands ††. Our Lord plainly acquaints his disciples, that no pretensions of intimacy with him, zeal in his cause, or regard to positive appointments, would be of any avail to a worker of iniquity ‡‡‡. — As to the Jewish ceremonies, they are termed a yoke of bondage ||||; a yoke which neither they of that age nor their fathers were able to bear * *. The church, or commonwealth

* Matth. ix. 13.; xii. 7.

† Mark ii. 27.

‡ Matth. xv. 11.

|| Matth. xv. 20.; Mark vii. 3. &c.

— John iv. 20. 21. 23.

++ 1 Cor. vii. 19.; Gal. v. 6.;

vi. 15.

= 1 Cor. viii. 8.

** Rom. xiv. 17.

†† Acts vii. 48.

‡‡ Math. vii. 22. 23.; Luke xiii. 26. 27.

||| Gal. v. 1.

* * Acts xv. 10.

of God, whilst under them, was considered as in a state of nonage, like a child not arrived at the full exercise of reason, under tutors and preceptors, subjected to many cumbersome regulations, which derived their utility and fitness from his insufficiency. They are therefore styled *the elements of this world* *, and *weak and beggarly elements* †.

The institution of Christ, on the contrary, is exhibited to us as a spiritual law ‡, a law of rational and manly liberty ||. The few exterior rites which it admits, are regarded purely as means; and consequently the value of the observance must arise, either from its being used with a view to improvement, or from its being a genuine expression of devout affection, or a sincere engagement to a Christian life.— But is there not something more in them? Have we not ground to believe that they are accompanied with the divine benediction? Yes doubtless; the pious and suitable use of them is so accompanied. In any other use prayer is abominable +, and sacrifice profane ++.

* Gal. iv. 1. 2. 3. † Gal. iv. 9. ‡ Rom. viii. 2.

|| James i. 25.; ii. 12. + Prov. xxviii. 9. ++ If. lxvi. 3.

Quickly,

Quickly, indeed, did men begin to lose sight of the use, when employed in the exercises of religion. Ceremonies were daily multiplied, and, under pretence of being rendered more awful, they were gradually disguised by such mummeries, that at length it was not possible to conceive any other purpose they could answer, but to beget in the ignorant a stupid wonder, and in the fearful a superstitious dread. The very multiplication of mere rites, which are but secondary and instrumental, takes off mens attention from that which is primary and essential. But the matter did not rest here. It was indeed impossible that it should. Miraculous virtues began to be ascribed to the bare celebration of the rites ; and astonishing dogmas began to be broached about their nature and efficacy. Every thing moral, every thing spiritual, in the divine service, came to be supplied by things merely sensible. In process of time the understanding was conceived to have so little concern in the matter, that it was of no consequence whether the language employed in worship was understood by the worshippers, or not. Penance was substituted

in lieu of repentance, public worship dwindled into pageantry, and private devotion into telling of beads. Thus the most sublime, the most manly, the most rational institution, at length sunk into the most abject, the most puerile, the most absurd. I might add, the most benevolent religion, into the most malignant superstition. O degenerate Christians ! if yet I can call you Christians, who hath bewitched you ? Are ye so foolish, having begun in the spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh ? Dare ye say, that ye have stood fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free ? and that ye have taken care not to be intangled again with a yoke of bondage * ? Ye have had warning. Ye see with what severity the apostle treated in others the very slightest symptoms of this disease, now so inveterate in you †. But what effect have either reproaches or admonitions had on you ?

* Μὴ πάλιν ὅγειρας εὐχετήσει. The Apostle says, *ὅγειρας*, without the article. Our translators have not so properly rendered it *the yoke*, as though it related only to the Jewish. Those ceremonies he opposeth, not because they were Jewish, but because they were a grievous yoke, and gendered to bondage.

† Gal. iii. 1. &c. ; v. 1. &c.

I must indeed acknowledge, that so great and so universal a defection could not fail to furnish the adversaries of our religion with at least a plausible argument against it, if this very defection had not been so expressly, and so particularly, foretold in scripture. That it hath been so foretold, produceth now a contrary effect, and supplies the friends of Christianity with a strong argument in its defence.

But to return : To ascribe a virtue to an outward form, unaccompanied by any disposition that can render it significant *, I take to be of the essence of superstition, and in a great degree subversive of true religion. It represents the ordinances of Jesus as no better than magical spells. For where is the difference, if the effect in both results purely from words and gestures ? Besides, who will think of purity of heart, if washing the body will do the business ? who will study reformation of life, if punctuality in certain rites will cancel his guilt † ?

To

* This is what the council of Trent hath called the *opus operatum*.

† Audio, videoque, plurimos esse qui in locis, vestibus, cibis, jejuniis, gesticulationibus, cantibus, summam pietatis constituant;

To enumerate the particular instances of this abuse would be endless. I shall only specify one, which is very general. Hath not the remission of sins been ascribed to the rite of baptism? and, in consequence of this, hath not the indispensable necessity of that ordinance to salvation been strenuously maintained? I own I mention this sentiment the rather, because it is a remainder of the old leaven, which many of the Reformed have not yet entirely purged out. Shall I be deemed to derogate from a Christian institution of the greatest utility, when rightly understood, and used, because I would clear it from those misrepresentations which tend to pervert its nature, and frustrate its design? On the same principle the prophets, and apostles, and even Christ himself, could not have escaped the censure of vilifying the most solemn rites of divine appointment, when, with some warmth, they represented to a

fitiunt; et ex his proximum judicant contra præceptum evangelicum. Unde fit, ut cum omnia referantur ad fidem et caritatem, harum rerum superstitione extinguitur utrumque. Procul enim abest a fide evangelica, qui fudit hujusmodi factis; et procul abest a caritate Christiana, qui ob potum aut cibum, quo recte quis uti potest, exasperat fratrem, pro cuius libertate mortuus est Christus. Erasmi *I^{χριστ}o^{νος}πατερικα*. — The whole dialogue is an illustration of this truth,

superstitious

superstitious nation, that they ascribed to them an efficacy which did not belong to them. On the contrary, by acting thus, the ordinance is in the most effectual manner honoured, the reasonableness of the service shown, and the ways of God vindicated.

Of such formalists in devotion as can suppose, that the most precious gifts of Heaven depend upon external rites, allow me to ask, Was not the faith and confession of the thief on the cross available to his salvation, without baptism * ? Was not Cornelius the centurion in a state of acceptance with God, before his being in this manner admitted into the church, and outwardly assuming the yoke of Christ ? The demonstration of his being so by the gifts of the Holy Ghost, is the very cause assigned by Peter of his admitting him, and those with him, though uncircumcised, to baptism : *Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did to us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what was I that I could withstand God † ?* Afterwards, alluding to the same memorable event, he says, *God, who know-*

* Luke xxiii. 39. &c.

† Acts xi. 17.

*eth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did to us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith *.* Is not this telling us, God showed us evidently by those extraordinary gifts, that he had received them into favour as his people; and could we, after that, without impiety, refuse to admit them by the symbol of baptism into our communion as brethren?

It will scarce be pretended, that baptism is of greater efficacy under the new economy than circumcision was under the old. That this ceremony was essential to a state of acceptance with God, was the doctrine of many Jewish Rabbies, and of all the Judaizing teachers among the Christians †. Superstition, of whatever time or place, and however diversified, is uniform in character, and always attends more to the form than to the power, to the letter than to the spirit of every institution. The contrary side, with regard to circumcision, the Apostle Paul hath maintained, in a manner which admits no reply. Thus he argues concerning Abra-

* Acts xv. 8. 9.

† Acts xv. 1.

ham :

ham : *We say, that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised**. But we need not found our reasoning entirely on the analogy of the two ordinances. The same argument which the Apostle here useth will apply literally to the point in hand. The fact lately quoted is as apposite in the one case as the story of Abraham is in the other. ‘ We say, then, that the hearts of Cornelius, and the other Gentiles that were with him, were purified by faith. How were they purified? was it in baptism, or before being baptized? Not in baptism, but before being baptized. And they received the sign of baptism, a seal of the purification by faith, which they had yet being unbaptized.’

The doctrine that we are now combating is precisely the same with that which Paul so warmly combated in those Judaizers. The application only is different. It is

* Rom. iv. 9. 10. 11.

not against the ceremony of circumcision that his arguments are levelled, as I propose soon clearly to evince, but against the principle by which the ceremony was enforced, and which he considers as subversive of the spirit of religion. What was that principle? It was that which attached the pardon of sin and the favour of God to external observances. It is a matter of little consequence, what the particular observance is. It was the spirit of Judaism, and not the form, that he so vehemently, and so successfully, opposed. I do not mean, by Judaism, the Old-Testament dispensation as given by Moses, but as adulterated afterwards by the traditions of the elders, and the Rabbinical commentaries. The former, the pure Mosaic establishment, the Apostle vindicates from this charge. According to it, *He is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, whose praise is not of men, but of God**. The same is the doctrine of the Apostle Peter, concerning that baptism

* Rom. ii. 28. 29.

by which we Christians are saved. It is not, he tells us, *the washing away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God**. In neither case is it the sign itself; but it is that renovation of mind which is stipulated by it. Baptism is represented as a sign of regeneration; and, by a very common idiom, those qualities are sometimes attributed to the sign which belong properly to the thing signified. In this place, however, the Apostle hath so qualified his expression as not to leave a colour for mistake. I shall therefore conclude this argument, by saying, in the spirit of both Apostles, and almost in the words of the former, ‘ He ‘ is not a Christian who is one outwardly ; neither is that baptism which is ‘ outward in the flesh : but he is a Christian who is one inwardly ; and baptism is that of the heart, in the spirit, ‘ whose praise is not of men, but of ‘ God.’

Thus I have given a sketch of the most general principles of corruption, which, when men seemed to think that a sound mind had no concern in religion, tainted

* 1 Pet. iii. 21.

the Christian system in every part, in doctrine, morals, and worship. I have hitherto taken notice only of those causes which hold of the spirit of false religion. That other causes co-operated, is but too evident. From the turn things quickly took, the deception of the many came to be regarded as the interest of the few. I do not mean by this to charge the whole clerical order, or even the greater part of them, as knowingly sacrificing the truth to secular views. I would not affirm, that, even in the leaders themselves, all were to be put to the account of priestcraft, and nothing to that of superstition or enthusiasm. That motives will operate upon us, whereof we are in some respect unconscious, is a truth which I shall soon exemplify in two of the disciples. The understanding is too generally the dupe of the passions; and we are easily brought to believe what would gratify a predominant inclination. It is with peculiar propriety said in scripture, that *a gift blindeth the wise* *. His imagined interest even perverts his judgement. A man may be said, in some sense, conscientiously to pursue a

* Ex. xxiii. 8.

course,

course, to which originally avarice, or the lust of dominion, was the prime mover. But in so great a variety of agents, there would no doubt be a variety of motives, and often a mixture of these in the same person. That covetousness and ambition joined their aids, it is impossible to doubt, when one considers how uniformly all the abuses pointed to the aggrandisement of a particular class.

How much was Peter shocked at the impiety of Simon Magus, who offered him money for the power of conferring the Holy Ghost by the imposition of his hands *? What would have been the Apostle's indignation, to have seen his pretended successors set a price on the pardon of sin, a gift of Heaven of infinitely more consequence than miraculous powers! Once he was astonished at his Master's declaration, that it was difficult for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God †: but how much greater would his astonishment have been, to find, that the only difficulty now was for a poor man to get thither; and that the woes denounced against

* Acts viii. 18. &c.

† Matth. xix. 23. &c.; Mark x. 23. &c.; Luke xviii. 24. &c.

the rich, and blessings pronounced upon the poor *, ought all to be reversed.

Nor was this the only instance of an opposition in the maxims that were afterwards adopted, to those of him, who, being the founder and the finisher of the faith, cannot be supposed to have left any thing defective for them to supply, much less any thing wrong for them to alter. The benign language of his doctrine was, *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice* †; the exercise of the moral virtues, rather than any ritual performances. Theirs, on the contrary, clamours loudly in our ears, “I “will have sacrifice, and not mercy.” Christ told his apostles, that he sent them forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, strictly charging them to be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves ‡. It was after the revolution of not many ages, when those who pretended to derive their authority from this celestial source, having gotten the power into their hands,—showed themselves, by the most cruel evidences, to be wolves in the midst of sheep.

What shall I say of that spirit of persecution, the disgrace of humanity, the re-

* Luke vi. 20. 21. 24. 25.

† Matth. ix. 13.; xii. 7.

‡ Matth. x. 16.

proach

proach of religion, the poison of life, which most preposterously, under the banner of the cross, hath tyrannized with unrelenting fury? What is that kingdom of God, permit me to ask the persecutor, which you desire to promote by such sanguinary methods? Paul tells us, *The kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost**. To this the knowledge of the truths of the gospel is indeed eminently subservient. But are the threatenings of racks and gibbets the evidences of truth, or the means of giving conviction to the understanding? ‘Perhaps not; yet they may induce people to profess the true faith, whether their profession be sincere or hypocritical.’ Is it then the way of promoting truth, to tempt men to become liars? Do ye advance righteousness by forcing them to commit iniquity? Do ye contribute to their peace, by making them give a mortal wound to conscience, and rase the foundations of hope and joy? ‘Ay, but though they should be disseminators, their children may be orthodox believers; and, by proper examples of wholesome severity, others through ter-

* Rom. xiv. 17.

'nor are made submissive to the spiritual powers.' I see we differ too widely in first principles to be fit for arguing together. Two things you assume, which, in my judgement, are incompatible with the spirit of Christ. One is, That we may do evil to promote a good end; the other is, That Jesus came to establish the most absurd tyranny of a few, bestowing on them the extraordinary privilege of trampling on all the most sacred rights of mankind; for what is more sacred than veracity, than probity, than peace of conscience? I am satisfied, on the contrary, that not even the apostles themselves were vested by their master with any dominion over the faith of others. This dominion, though you, forsooth, presume to claim it, was explicitly disclaimed by them. Their only mean of converting was persuasion; their weapons, reason, scripture, and the demonstration of the Spirit; their only armour, wisdom, meekness, fortitude, and patience *. O incorrigible! are ye still so much in the spirit of Judaism, that no messiah will suit you without a temporal kingdom? It is not an external profession,

* 2 Cor. i. 24.; v. 11. 20.; 2 Tim. ii. 24. 25.

but

but an internal character, in which the life of Christ's religion consists. Whoever aims a blow here, aims it at the heart, at the very vitals of his institution. For *the kingdom of God cometh not with observation.* *Neither shall they say, Lo here, or, Lo there: for behold, the kingdom of God is within you* *. Wouldst thou know then, O zealot, whether thou pertainest to this spiritual kingdom? Search for its characters in thy own heart; and be assured, that if thou dost not find them there, thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter.

But you do not know the fiend by which you are actuated. Shall I attempt the discovery? Pride is hurt by contradiction. If this contradiction be in things of moment, or things we fancy such, and if persisted in, it seems to betray a contempt of our judgement; a contempt which we cannot easily brook, and have commonly but too strong a propensity to resent. This propensity is vicious; and it is what the spirit of the gospel, which is a spirit of love and of forbearance, tends powerfully to correct. But if, unhappily, we be tinctured with the venom of superstition or fa-

* Luke xvii. 20. 21.

naticism, or if we be duped by the villany and worldly aims of those in whose understanding we put confidence, we begin to view things in another manner; we christen our rancour by the name of *zeal*; and a most impure flame, brought originally from hell, we think it our duty to cherish as the holy fire of God's altar.

We have an admirable example in the history of our Lord, which so perfectly confirms what hath been said, both in relation to mistaken zeal, and the true spirit of the gospel, that if aught could surprise us on this head, it would be surprising, that any who durst call themselves his followers, should so flagrantly take up the plea of the disciples against their master. *It came to pass, says the Evangelist*, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem; and sent messengers before his face. And they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciple's James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command*

* Luke ix. 51. &c.

fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy mens lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.

The Samaritans, by our Saviour's own account, were in the wrong in those articles wherein they differed from the Jews *. In the opprobrious style that is now so liberally bandied from sect to sect among Christians, they would have been heretics and schismatics. Bigots they certainly were, as appears from the matter of offence just now recited. Yet these pleas could have had no weight with the two disciples in support of their argument, had they before that time thoroughly imbibed the spirit of the gospel. And have not some other passages of the Jewish history, equally foreign to the purpose, such as Samuel's hewing Agag before the Lord, and the extermination of the Canaanites, been strenuously pleaded by persons of opposite sects for the glorious privilege of butchering one another in honour of the

* John iv. 22.

God of peace? Infatuated men! know your brethren. Your differences are merely accidental. A different education, or a small change in external circumstances, would have set each of you on the side opposite to that on which he now appears. And ye may depend upon it, that even in that case, the alteration in you would not have been material. It would have been more apparent than real, more in garb than in character. Ye are essentially one, actuated in every respect by the same spirit.

Is there then such a thing as Christian zeal? And if there be, how shall we distinguish it, that we may not, like the two disciples, mistake our motive, and imagine ourselves zealous, when we are only proud and vindictive? There is such a thing as Christian zeal; and it is easily distinguished. Being the offspring of knowledge, and nourished by love, its great object is inward purity: to distinctions merely exterior it pays little regard. There is in it an ardour for the truth, not that men may be either allured or terrified into a verbal profession of what they do not in their hearts believe, (the grossest infult

infult that can be offered to truth), but that they may attain a rational conviction. The interests of truth itself it desires to promote for a still further end; that by means of it, love may be kindled both to God and man; that by means of it, temperance, and justice, and piety, and peace, may flourish on the earth. A man thus minded, will not sacrifice the end to the means; nor do a false, unjust, or cruel action, even for the sake of truth itself. The persecutor (supposing all worldly motives totally excluded) is at best, in the eye of true zeal, one who, for the sake of the form of godliness, would extirpate its power, and trample all that is most sacred and valuable among men.

To Christian zeal let us contrast the zeal of sectarism. Perhaps it will be needful to explain the term. Any person who hath entered into my sentiments, will not misunderstand me so far, as to suppose, that I mean to throw an oblique reflection on sects which have not the advantage of a legal establishment. I know the word is sometimes used in this illiberal way. But a man who hath a just notion of the dignity of religion, is incapable of the mean-
ness

ness of piquing himself on a circumstance merely secular and local, which may as readily favour, and doth as frequently support error as truth; the grossest superstition, or the wildest fanaticism, as the purest and most reasonable worship. I mean, then, by the zeal of sectarism in any person, that ardour, which, attending chiefly to party-distinctions, seeks to increase the number of retainers to that sect, established by law or unestablished, (the word is applicable to both), to which he himself happens to be attached. Every judicious man will frankly own, that a zeal of this kind sometimes appears in characters where there never appeared a spark of zeal for the conversion of a soul from sin to God; for that love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance, which are the ornaments of our nature, the fruits of the Spirit *, and the glory of the Christian name. I do not say, that these two kinds are never united. I know the contrary. But I say, they are often separate; and that therefore there is no necessary connection between them. As to the former, who

* Gal. v. 22. 23.

were more remarkable for the sectarian zeal than the Pharisees, that compassed sea and land to make one proselyte? Whether they had an equal share in the latter kind, let the sequel of the account declare, They made him twofold more the child of hell than themselves *. And in modern times, you will find, in that communion or sect which can boast a legal establishment in most kingdoms of Europe, perhaps more zealots on the Pharisaic model than could be collected out of all the other communions. In fact, this zeal is but a species of party-spirit at the most. If a community is divided into factions, whatever be the ground of division (it may be different systems in politics, different theories in philosophy, as well as differences in religion) it is natural for every partyman to wish to augment the number of his party. Every additional suffrage is imagined to add something in confirmation of his own judgement. This principle operates on religious parties more strongly from the conceived importance of the subject.

If, added to this, there be any of those

* Matth. xxiii. 15.

violent prejudices, which are so easily infused and cherished in a weak understanding, and contracted temper, there results that most unlovely form we call *Bigotry*, which would fain pass herself on the world for *Zeal*, but in disposition hath no more resemblance to her, than superstition bears to religion, or the hatred of man, to the love of God. We have already taken notice of their difference in nature and origin. With regard to the effects, we may say, they are not only dissimilar, but in some things opposite; insomuch that our mistaking the one for the other is even matter of astonishment. The object of the first is the form, of the second the power, of godliness. The means they employ are extremely unlike. *Bigotry* persecutes; *Zeal* persuades. The former, where she cannot exterminate, will create division. She hath a bitterness of spirit that cannot brook opposition in the merest trifle. She will not associate with those who cannot conform in every thing to her humour. A mite she magnifies into a mole-heap, and a mole-heap into a mountain. At once jealous and inflexible, and consequently of a temper the reverse of that of the peacemaker, she is ever discovering reason for making

making a breach where there is none, and for widening it where it hath unluckily been made. The latter, in all these particulars, acts a contrary part. Candid in judging, and warmed with kindness, she always aims at union, assiduously promoting peace. She understands the import of moderation and mutual forbearance, and can cordially receive as brethren persons who differ in some sentiments ; avoiding matters of doubtful disputation, and whatever might prove a cause of stumbling to the weak. In brief, as Zeal is constantly attended and inspired by Charity, she may at all times be distinguished by the company of her amiable friend. This last you cannot fail to know, if you attend to the picture that hath been drawn of her by the masterly hand of our Apostle, in the most inimitable colours *. Who, on the other hand, is the most intimate companion of Bigotry, let the uncharitable judgments, malignity, and calumny, for which she is so remarkable, declare. The impartial must see, and the charitable will lament, the envenomed misrepresentations which, to the detriment of the common

* 1 Cor. xiii.

cause, the bigotted of every denomination give of the opinions and practices of every other.

I observed that one great engine of false zeal is division. It will be worth while to consider this more particularly, and inquire into that factious spirit which hath so much infested the Christian world, to the great scandal of the friends, and the no small triumph of the enemies, of religion. People are commonly ingenious enough to devise excuses for what is the natural result of the worst passions of their frame. Let us fairly canvass those pleas which are generally used on this subject. — One is, the danger of contracting impurity by an intermixture with the impure. The argument of such advocates for separation is justly represented by the prophet: *Stand by thyself; come not near to me; for I am holier than thou* *. There are two things (I speak to the authors and promoters of division, whoever they be) of which you would need to be ascertained, before you introduce strife and dissension among those who live in unity; knowing, that where these are, there is confusion, and every e-

* *H. lxv. 5.*

vil work *. The first thing I would have you be assured of is, that ye have truth on your side. It is not every specious deduction by inference from scripture, that ought to be put on the same footing with those doctrines which are clearly revealed there. I know that all bigots are equally dogmatical on every point. And it is not difficult to account for this. They hold all their opinions by the same tenure of implicit faith. But no discerning person, no one who is properly capable of forming a judgement, ever pretended, that there was for every opinion equal evidence. If the Apostle of the Gentiles may be credited, there are even in religion matters of doubtful disputation, which ought never to disturb the harmony of Christians, much less make a rent in their communion †. The second thing of which you would need to be well informed is, that the ground of separation be a matter of importance. The consequences of a breach are important, and the cause would need to be proportionate. ‘ But is not every point important that concerns religion ?’ Admitted. Yet we have

* James iii. 16.

† Rom. xiv.

the best authority to affirm, that there are weightier and less weighty matters of the law *. Nay more, as was hinted already, we are authorised to affirm, that there are points regarding religion, about which, though we differ in judgement, we ought not to divide.

Some have, very weakly, in my opinion, introduced the example of the primitive Christians in separating from Jews and Pagans, as furnishing a good defence of separation among Christians from one another. Concerning the former, it is alledged, that the circumstance which most incensed their enemies against them, was, that they would admit no intercommunity with those of other religions, that is, say they, with those who did not perfectly concur with them in their religious sentiments. There is a misunderstanding here which I shall endeavour to unravel. The matter well deserves to be traced from the beginning.

Our Lord Jesuſ Christ did not only himself attend the service in the synagogue every sabbath, and in the temple on the solemn festivals, but commanded his disci-

* Matth. xxiii. 23.

ples to do the same : *The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Whatsoever therefore they bid you observe, that observe, and do* *. Yet it is well known, that our Lord had some exceptions to their doctrine, as well as to their lives. The conduct of his apostles, and his other followers of the Jewish nation, continued, in this, after his ascension, to be conformable to his example and instructions. They punctually attended both the synagogue-worship † and the temple-service ‡, as we learn from the Acts of the Apostles, notwithstanding that the nation had openly rejected and crucified the Messiah. Their maxim was, that whereto they had attained, they should walk by the same rule ||. Both Jews and Christians had attained to the knowledge of one God, a spirit of infinite perfection ; and the latter found nothing unsuitable in the practice of concurring with the former, in adoring their common creator, and in hearing those scriptures read, which both sides admitted

* Matth. xxiii. 3.

† Acts ix. 20. ; xiii. 5. 14. &c. ; xiv. 1. ; xvii. 1. 2. 17. ; xviii. 4.

‡ Acts ii. 46. ; iii. 1. ; xxi. 26. ; xxii. 17. ; xxiv. 18.

|| Phil. iii. 16.

to be divinely inspired ; though sometimes the reading was accompanied with explications which Christians could not approve. Nor doth it appear, that they desisted from this conformity, till the Jews, by a sentence of excommunication, compelled them to desist, as our Lord had predicted *. Were we to examine this conduct by modern ideas, I am afraid the apostles themselves would not escape the charge of Latitudinarian. But in those times, separation in the way now practised, was a thing utterly unknown. Few sects of Christians differ so widely in their principles, as the Pharisees and Sadducees among the Jews did ; yet it deserves our notice, that both attended worship in the same temple, and in the same synagogues. Neither of them became separatists, in the sense in which the word is understood amongst us.

Even the Christians themselves were not wholly without diversity of opinions in the apostolic age. The grand question which first occupied them was about the Mosaic ceremonies †. This point was determined at Jerusalem, in a convention of the apostles, elders, and brethren, by a resolve alike moderate and judicious ‡. With re-

* John xvi. 2.

† Acts xv. 1.

‡ Acts xv. 6. &c.

gard

gard to the Jewish converts, there was no dispute. They had been in the use hitherto of giving the same punctual obedience to the rites of the law, since their conversion to Christianity, as before. And there was no new injunction given them now; they were left entirely to their freedom. As to the Gentile brethren *, about whom alone the debate was started, they were required only to abstain from a few things, which were particularly scandalous to the Jews; and in other respects were declared free from any obligation to the observance of the Mosaic institution. There was, it would appear, in that assembly, none of those violent sticklers for uniformity, so common in after times, when mens zeal began to fix on the exterior part only. I cannot help observing by the way, that those who are vested with the most undoubted title to authority, are generally more moderate in the use of it, than those whose power is questionable at least, if not usurped. In consequence of this judgement, both Jewish and Gentile disciples lived in full communion together as Christians, notwithstanding that the one set ob-

* Acts xix. 23. &c.

served a multitude of rites not minded by the other.

The matter did not rest here. Several Jewish brethren, who had the most enlarged views of the gospel-dispensation, began, when they were among Gentiles, and not in hazard of scandalizing their countrymen, to omit observing the legal rites altogether. Others, of weaker minds, and narrower views, could not surmount the scruple of abandoning customs which from their infancy they had been taught to revere*. In neither of these classes was there any disobedience to the decree given at Jerusalem, which did not ordain any thing with regard to the Jewish proselytes, and by its silence did indeed permit, but not command, them to retain their ceremonies. There was a third class, who, in open defiance of that decree, maintained the indispensable necessity of circumcision to salvation; and, consequently, wanted to writh this yoke about the necks of all the Gentile converts. It is worth while to observe the different manner in which Paul treated these different classes.

With the first he concurred in opinion: at the same time he enjoined them, not to say

* Acts xxi. 20.

say or do any thing that might be offensive to the weak, who were those of the second class; insisting, that there were opinions which, though true, were not of that consequence, that we ought to endanger the interests of charity by an unseasonable display of them. What tenderness doth he not show even to the errors of those who, though weakly scrupulous, were truly conscientious? This topic he hath touched occasionally in almost all his writings; but hath fully discussed it in the epistle to the Romans *; and in such a manner, that it would be impossible to say, whether the spirit of love, or of a sound mind, shines forth most conspicuously in the discussion.

The third class he treats in a very different manner; and strains every nerve to detect their sophistry, and prevent their influence. Was it that the Jewish rites were worse than any other? No: But it was because that doctrine, which made the favour of Heaven depend on mere ceremonies, was totally subversive of the spirit of the gospel. And such the doctrine of the Judaizing teachers evidently was. *Ex-*

* Chap. xiv.

*cept ye be circumcised, said they, after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved **. Nothing could be more contradictory to all the rational and generous sentiments which the gospel of Jesus inspires, than this flippish and superstitious tenet. We have seen already, that no man could make, or require others to make, greater allowances than he did for the observance of those very rites, when that observance did not proceed from this absurd principle : a principle which tended at once to degrade in our conceptions the divine Majesty, to pervert the natural sense which God hath given us of right and wrong, and to shake at least, if not overturn, the doctrine of our reconciliation by Jesus. The Apostle, then, was sensible of the difference between truth and importance even in religious matters.

Without distinguishing these several classes, we shall never be able to perceive the consistency of the Apostle's conduct on this head. When he says at one time, *Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing* † ; which plainly implies, that we are neither the better nor the worse for

* *Act. xv. 1.*

† *Cor. vii. 19.*

submitting

submitting to this ceremony ; and at another, as he did to the Galatians on whom the Judaizing teachers had made an impression, *If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing**; it must be owned there is in these an apparent inconsistency. It may be plausibly urged against him, If all we have by Christ shall be forfeited by our receiving this seal of Judaism, and subjecting ourselves to the yoke of the law, why did Paul himself, after his conversion, circumcise Timothy †. Why did he, when he was among the Jews, live agreeably to the ordinances of the law, and, along with others, go through the ceremonies of purification in the temple ‡ for the discharge of a vow ||? Why doth he

treat

* Gal. v. 2. † Acts xvi. 1. &c. ‡ Acts xxi. 26.

|| I know that some have censured the Apostle for this step, and considered it as a culpable compliance with an advice which favoured too much of the wisdom of the world. The bad success of this expedient they look on as a providential rebuke for temporizing. I am not satisfied of the justice of this censure, for the following reasons. 1. Our Apostle being of the Jewish nation, was evidently at liberty to use the ceremonies, if he pleased. 2. Though he expressly declares them not available to salvation, he never pronounces them either unlawful or inexpedient for those who were Jews by birth. 3. He avows it to be his ordinary method, among the Jews, to live as a Jew. (1 Cor. ix. 20.) 4. If Paul had not previously had a vow, and during its continuance observed the abstinen-

treat the distinction of days, and of meats, and the other legal observances, as matters of indifference, and enjoin on all fides mutual forbearance on these articles * ? It will be impossible, in a satisfactory manner, to answer these questions, without admitting the distinction above explained. From the whole, however, it is indisputable, that there was not among Christians a perfect unanimity on every point, even in the apostolic age; that, notwithstanding this, they lived in harmony and unity, and in full communion with one another, as became brethren in Christ.

That the church had no intercommunion in sacred matters with idolaters, is indeed equally incontestable. Is there then no sufficient ground, except idolatry, for breaking off from all fellowship in reli-

ces prescribed by the law, can it be imagined, that one who had any regard to piety or truth, would have either advised or consented to such dissimulation in a solemn act of religion? 5. That he actually had a vow, and observed the precept relating to it, when he had no temptation to temporize, is evident from Acts xviii. 18. 6. That the bad success of this expedient should be construed as a rebuke from Heaven, is a supposition as arbitrary, as it would be to affirm, that when Peter was beaten by order of the Sanhedrim, this should be interpreted as a divine reproof for his teaching in the temple, where he had been apprehended.

* Rom. xiv.

gious matters ? That idolatrous worship is a sufficient reason (whether the community from which we separate be called Christian or not) there can be no question. That it is the only reason, I do not say. If, as a condition of communion, a positive assent to opinions, or approbation of practices, were required, which we could not give without falsehood, this also would be a sufficient ground. It can never be our duty to lie or dissemble. I do not say, that these are all the just grounds of separation ; though I cannot at present recollect any other. But this I do say, that where it is once made on Christian grounds, it is much oftener the effect of pride and passion.

Allow me to ask, on the other hand, Is there no danger from separation ? Is it of no consequence, think ye, to increase so epidemical an evil ? Paul thought not so lightly of the matter, when he so warmly checked the first motions of this spirit in the Corinthians, though it had no appearance of creating an open rupture *. Is Christ, the head, divided, that ye make so little account of disjoining the members ? or

* 1 Cor. i. 11. &c.; iii. 3. &c.

is each sect arrogant enough to appropriate him to themselves? Is there no danger of giving to your several leaders the honour which belongs only to your Lord? Was any of those teachers crucified for you? or were ye baptized in his name? It is but too evident, whatever ye may pretend, that ye *do* call men *Rabbi*, and *Father*; that ye *do* admit other masters than Christ, to whose several dictates and glosses ye are blindly devoted. Ye do not say indeed, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas; but ye have gotten names much less respectable, which ye substitute in their place. When such contentions subsist amongst you, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? Is not your conduct more influenced by the passions of the men of this world, than by the example and maxims of Christ?

To set this matter in another light: Is there no danger of wounding charity, the end of the commandment, and the bond of perfectness? Is there no danger of narrowing the sphere of that brotherly love, which every disciple of Jesus owes to every other? Is there no danger that ye vitiate your own temper; that your minds rankle against

against your brethren ; that, from attending too close to what ye judge faulty in them, ye come at length to be incapable of discovering any good in them at all ? This is but too common a progress. The mind, uneasy under an antipathy of which it is become unable to get rid, casts about for means to justify it. These it will never be difficult to find, when one is in the humour of seeking for them. Every ill is then exaggerated, and every good misconstrued. It is the character of charity, that it thinketh no evil *. In the track we would warn you against, ye are almost sure of contracting an intimacy with her antagonist, malice, which thinketh no good. Were there no danger of these things, it is not your preferring other pastors, or even some differences in opinion and external order, that should ever have induced me to use a single expostulation on the subject.

It was the remark of a late witty author, that “ we have religion enough to make “ us hate, but not enough to make us love “ one another †.” The fact is but too generally experienced. Yet when we con-

* 1 Cor. xiii, 5,

† Swift,

fider

fider the remark, it must at first appear a paradox. For if the perfection of religion would produce the perfection of love, surely a less degree of the former should produce a less degree of the latter; but that it should produce hatred, which is the opposite of love, seems inconceivable. The riddle however, upon attention, is easily solved. The religion that produceth hatred will not be found to differ only in degree from that which produceth love, but in spirit and in kind. When therefore from what we call religion we feel such an effect upon our minds, we have but too great reason to suspect, that we have more of the sectary than of the Christian in us, and that our religion hath in it more of the false, than of the true; that our zeal is bigotry, and our supreme regards no better than a dotage about questions and strifes of words, vain janglings, and oppositions of science falsely so called.

But there is something more here than hath been yet accounted for. Weak judgement and ungovernable passions may give rise to those differences that breed division; but when sects are once formed, political causes co-operate in producing that malignity

nity which they so commonly bear to one another. It becomes in some respect the interest or credit of their respective leaders, to keep the party together. No method is so effectual for attaining this end, as to magnify every point on which they differ from others, as of the utmost consequence, and to make the whole attention of their adherents center there. Others are represented as being in the high road of perdition. For this purpose every passage in scripture about heathens and idolaters is miserably wrested, that it may appear intended for their neighbours of other sects. These are sometimes Pharisees and Sadducees, sometimes publicans and sinners, and always *They that are without*. For any of their own fraternity occasionally to join in worship with those of another party, is no better than *bowing the knee to Baal*: for they themselves only are *the small remnant, the elect, the little flock*; and, exactly in the spirit of Judaism, they think God hath no concern about all the world besides. Nothing can equal the dogmatism and arrogance with which one sect pronounceth sentence against another, except perhaps the dogmatism and arro-

O gance

gance with which that other retaliates upon them. If this policy hath in it of the wisdom of the serpent, it is not in conjunction with the innocence of the dove. If it has the wisdom of the serpent, it hath his venom too. It hath not the signature of the wisdom that is from above, which is *pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy* *. On the contrary, earthly in its nature, and devilish in its tendency, it is at best but the subtlety of the old serpent, who beguiled Eve, who hath contributed so much to extirpate love from the earth, and to sow the seeds of discord in its stead.

In what words shall I address those simple ones, who allow themselves to be deceived by so ill-disguised an artifice? If one of the parties in any common quarrel, should, after telling you his story, insist with you not to hear his adversary, whom he abuseth very liberally, assuring you that he would only mislead your judgement; could ye entertain a favourable idea of that man's cause? If you were constituted the judge in it, would

* James iii. 17.

you be in this manner induced to give your decision without hearing both sides? Are ye silly enough, then, to be gulled in regard to religion, a matter wherein you yourselves are so deeply concerned, by a trick so poor, that it could not impose on a person of common sense in the most trifling occurrence? Have ye eyes? Look around you. Do ye not perceive hundreds, nay thousands, seduced by the very same methods, into sentiments opposite to yours, and made to entertain as horrid a notion of you as it is possible for you to entertain of them? You are certain that they are deluded; and they are certain that you are deluded; and both have equal reason. Ought not this to make you suspect an expedient, which you must acknowledge is so often used successfully in the cause of error? Properly in that cause only. For is it, I pray you, vice or virtue that shuns the light? Is it truth or falsehood that declines an open trial? Reason will tell you, your Lord and Master will tell you*, (for ye still call him Master and Lord), that it is vice and falsehood. But if his word had half the weight

* John iii. 20. 21.

with you that the verdicts of your Rabbi's have, ye could not be imposed on by such a contemptible piece of priestcraft. Perhaps you are of a party (for I know there are such parties) which holds the name of *priest* in abhorrence, which detests the term *clergy*, and all other titles of that stamp. It may be so. Words are but sounds, and ye may be violently attached to the thing, in whatever way ye stand affected to the name. Doth any one claim or exercise a dominion over the faith of others? That man is a *priest* in the most odious sense the word bears. Doth he support his claim, by anathematizing those who do not acknowledge it? He avails himself of one of the most execrable, though at the same time one of the commonest engines, of priestcraft. "But who," say you, "claims any such dominion? We know "them not." I will tell you them. Whoever says, either in so many words, or in what is equivalent, "Be guided by me "only, and such as concur with me in "their opinions; but on the peril of "damnation hear no other;" that man claims it, whoever he be. It is he that assumes the title of *Rabbi*, that chuseth to
be

be called Master and Father upon earth; and thus usurps the office of his Lord. As *his* account only of the doctrine of Jesus is heard by you, as *his* explications only are regarded, as *his* solutions only of every doubt are admitted, ye are Christians just so far, and of such a form, as it pleases him ye should be; ye inadvertently constitute him umpire over your Master himself, and become much more properly his followers than the followers of Christ.

Would it be thought credible, if experience did not vouch the fact, that a policy covered by so thin a disguise, could prove successful; an antiquated and stale device, employed alike by men of the most repugnant sentiments and opposite interests; a device which carries the suspicious mark of conscious weakness in the front of it? One thing, however, truth compels me to urge in excuse of those who employ these secluding, damning, and terrifying methods. It is a case of necessity with them. The party cannot dispense with these arts. Rob them of this defence, and they are undone. If you examine impartially, you will soon be satisfied, that no cause ever yet had recourse to such base

shifts,

shifts, which could be supported by any better.

I cannot forbear, whether I am heard or not, addressing a few words to those presumptuous men, who thus consign each other to damnation for not agreeing with them in opinion on every article. It is for your own sakes I speak; for with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgement. Thou callest thyself a disciple of Jesus. Hast thou no regard to the commandment of thy Lord? Or hath he given a more express commandment than this? *Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgement ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again* *. Doth not he on whom thou darest to sit in judgement, profess to be a disciple of Jesus as well as thou? Whether he be really so or not, is another's affair, and not thine. *Who art thou, says Paul, that judgeth another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth* †. Besides, is there not one appointed judge of all the earth? and darest thou usurp his office? *Why doſt thou judge thy*

* Matth. vii. 1. 2.

† Rom. xiv. 4.

brother?

*brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgement-seat of Christ *.* There is one law-giver, says the Apostle James, *who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another †?* In every view this practice is condemned. It is fraught with danger to yourselves, with injury to your neighbour, and with impiety to your Lord.

Nothing is more common with polemic writers, than to complain of the pride of those who impugn their theories. It requires no great penetration to discern, that the pride of the writer is the source of the complaint. The charge is commonly reciprocal, and just on both sides. Would you know which is the proudest? You will not mistake the matter greatly in concluding, that it is he who on this topic makes the loudest clamour. But of all the species of pride and presumption that have ever yet appeared, it is certainly the most extravagant, for a puny mortal, the insect of a day, a reptile of the dust, to arrogate the prerogative of omniscience, to ascend the throne of the Most High, and

* Rom. xiv. 10.

† James iv. 12.

to point the thunders of almighty power. Is it to be wondered, that such a disposition should produce a spirit of persecution? It would be miraculous if it did not. Can the man who doth not hesitate to usurp one function of omnipotence, hesitate to usurp another? Would he who scruples not to pronounce sentence, scruple to execute it, if it were in his power? Yes, upon reflection, I am perswaded, that the far greater part of those blind zealots themselves would stop here. We are however too amply warranted by experience to say at least, that they will not scruple to confign him to a stake in this world, whom they do not scruple, in their usurped capacity of judges, to confign to hell-fire in the next.

We sometimes hear much of Antichrist amongst our controveſtists. Who is Antichrist? It is an usurper, who, under pretence of honouring Christ, supplants him, perverting the power he hath assumed to the seduction of the disciples *. We have seen already, that in the political artifices we have been combating, there is a double usurpation of the prerogatives

* 2 Theſt. ii. 3. &c.

of our Lord, both as the only infallible instructor of his people, and as the supreme judge of the world. This is therefore that malign spirit of Antichrist, whose baleful influences have, alas ! been but too widely diffused, to the unspeakable hurt of that godlike charity, without which, with all our pretensions to faith, and zeal, and knowledge, we are at best but sounding brafs, and tinkling cymbals *.

What then shall we say of those who differ from us in important articles ? What shall we say ? That, in our judgement, they err, not knowing the scriptures. What more should we say ? It belongs to the Omniscient, the searcher of hearts, and to him only, to say whether their error, if they be in an error, proceeds from pravity of disposition, or from causes in which the will had no share. Is it for us to determine, how much wood, and hay, and stubble, may be reared up on the only foundation, Jesus Christ ? Though the foreign materials, by the Apostle's account, will be consumed in the fiery trial they must undergo, yet the builder him-

* 1 Cor. xiii. 1. 2. 3.

self will be saved *. We are ever, like Peter, turning aside from the point in hand, (which is what immediately concerns ourselves), and, by a curiosity much less justifiable than his, inquiring, what will become of this man? When such a question ariseth in thy mind, O my fellow-christian, think thou hearest the voice of thy Divine Master, checking thy impertinence in the words addressed to the Apostle, *What is that to thee? Follow thou me †.*

IV. I proceed now, in the *last* place, to make some reflections on what hath been advanced.

1. First, I observe, That though the spirit of true religion, and the spirit of false, be not only different, but opposite, there may nevertheless be a portion of each in the same disposition. Man hath been said, not unjustly, to be a mass of contradictions. The union just now mentioned, however incongruous, is not more so, than that of vice and virtue, truth and error, which, though equally opposite, are often blended in the same character. From the

* 1 Cor. iii. 15.

† John xxi. 22.

specimen we have seen of false zeal in two of the disciples, it would be unjust to conclude, that they were then totally unacquainted with true religion. Instances may be supposed, and have actually happened, in which the genuine spirit of the gospel hath powerfully resisted in the mind, and happily overcome the motions of a misguided zeal, derived from a superstitious or fanatical education. Examples might no doubt be produced of a victory on the other side, when the influence of early prejudices deeply and firmly rooted, hath, on a particular occasion, misled one to act a part extremely unsuitable to the real piety and benevolence which have uniformly shone in the rest of his conduct. How far the plea of a misinformed conscience will go in extenuation of the crimes it occasions, it belongs not to us, but to the great judge of all the earth, to determine.

If, then, there appear evident marks of superstition or enthusiasm in a character, let us not conclude, that all must be false, that there can be nothing there of true religion, or the spirit of the gospel.----If there be an evident mixture of both, let us not

conclude, that there must be a natural affinity between true religion and false. A due attention to what hath been said, will satisfy us, that both ways of arguing are absolutely untenable.

2. I observe, secondly, That, from the spirit of the party, we cannot always infer with justice what spirit predominates in an individual belonging to that party. In what sects that were not idolatrous did there ever appear more of superstition, rancour, and furious zeal, than among the Pharisees and the Samaritans? Yet in both, our Saviour, who knew what was in man *, found persons to whom he could give an honourable testimony; persons too who were not in every thing superior to popular opinions and party-prejudices. That the apostles themselves had not attained this superiority till about the time of their Lord's ascension, is manifest from the question they put to him after his resurrection, *Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel* †? Both the above observations ought to teach us modesty in the opinions we form of mens characters.

* John ii. 25.

† Acts i. 6.

It hath been remarked already, that some principles are in their nature and origin superstitious. Such is the opinion which a late eminent writer * remarks to prevail among the Indians, that the water of the Ganges hath a sanctifying virtue, and that the dead whose ashes are thrown into it, are secured of an admission into Elysium. “What matters it,” says he, “whether one lives virtuously or not? He can order his body to be thrown into the Ganges.” Are absurdities of this kind peculiar to Paganism? Are there not some European countries in which men may say with equal reason, ‘What matters it how one lives? He can on his deathbed obtain the viaticum.’ And by their doctrine of sacraments, it is even of no consequence whether the dying man be sensible of what is done, or insensible. It is manifest, that these two dogmas are materially the same; they differ only in the form.

On the other hand, it must be acknowledged, that there are no religious institutions, how pure soever, which may not be superstitiously or fanatically used. A

* *De l'esprit des Loix*, liv. 24. ch. 14.

minister's conversing with the sick on the hope of the gospel, and joining with them in prayer, are duties which, when properly performed, have a natural tendency to prove solacing and instructive to the distressed, to the spectators, and to the minister himself. But if any person is absurd enough to consider the prayer of a minister, at the bedside of one in the agonies of death, as a passport to heaven, his sentiments do not differ essentially from theirs who rely on extreme unction, or the priest's absolution, as the grand security.

3. I observe, thirdly, That that set of opinions and practices is the most dangerous, which looks with the malignest aspect on love, and tends most to contract its circle. The Sectarian spirit hath inverted the rule laid down by our Lord, which was, to judge of teachers and their doctrines by their fruits *. The method now almost universally followed, is, to judge of their fruits by their doctrines. If these be not to our taste, the other cannot be good; if these receive our approbation, the other must be very bad ere

* Matth. vii. 15. &c.

they

they displease us. Every sect hath its own *Shibboleth*. One inquires about opinions; another, about ceremonies; a third, about ecclesiastical polity and hierarchy, proposing, as the sole authentic evidence of our being Christians, the examination of certain endless genealogies; as if Christ had intended that all his disciples should be antiquarians; because otherwise they could not have the satisfaction to know whether they were his disciples or not. Unfortunately for these people, all such spiritual pedigrees are so miserably lame, that if their rule were to be admitted, we should be involved in darkness on this subject, from which no antiquary could extricate us; and there would not remain the slightest evidence that there were a single Christian on the earth. We shall however be satisfied with Paul's rule on this subject, who enjoins every man, in order to make this important discovery with regard to himself, carefully to examine his own heart *.

Strange indeed, that none of these curious tests have been recommended to us by Christ, in order to direct us in the

* 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

choice of teachers. Still more strange, that all sects should, as it were by general consent, overlook the only rule he gave on this subject. He did not injoin the examination of captious questions, disputes often about words and phrases. He knew how unfit the bulk of mankind are for discussions of this sort. His rule is level to the capacity of all, and probably for this reason hath been so little regarded. Teachers and doctrines are to be distinguished by their fruits. That doctrine is the soundest, which has the happiest influence on the temper and lives of those who receive it; which operates most powerfully by love to God, and love to man. That, on the contrary, is to be deemed the worst, which has the unhappiest influence on the temper and life. We do not therefore send you to the inextricable mazes of disputation and logomachy, but to the only infallible test which Christ himself hath given us. It will not, sure, be imagined, that we mean, like the too narrow-minded disciple, to forbid any man to cast out devils in the name of Christ, because he followeth not with

us *. But we mean to warn every man against the influence of that teacher who would cast in devils in the name of Christ, whether he followeth with us or not. For we know no worse devils than contention, bitterness, spiritual pride, uncharitable judgements, detraction, malevolence. We mean further, if possible, to abate the rancour of sects towards one another, and to make the interests of charity surmount that worst species of priestly policy which but too much abounds in them all.

4. I remark, fourthly, That some of the strongest objections of infidels do not properly affect the gospel ; they affect only the corruptions which have been introduced by men into this divine religion. It may be added, that the same adventitious materials have been the foundation of the greater part of the controversies among Christians themselves.

To conclude : Let us, my Honoured Fathers and Brethren in the Ministry, think of the particular obligations we are brought under by the trust reposed in us, of recommending, both by doctrine and ex-

* Mark ix. 38.; Luke ix. 49.

ample, the genuine spirit of the gospel. There is not a community, any more than an individual, that is absolutely perfect; but perfection ought ever to be the aim of both. It is not our having the advantage of a legal establishment that will secure us against the temper of sectaries, though I can say with truth, that in my judgement (I may indeed be partial) there will not easily be found a Christian society that hath less of that temper. In a contagion so universal, it is hardly possible to escape entirely being infected. Let this consideration make us the more on our guard, that we may purge out the old leaven, and be a new lump in the Lord. Let us never descend to the unchristian artifice of ingratiating ourselves by traducing others. Still less let us think of the antichristian arrogance of usurping the office of the supreme Judge, and pronouncing the eternal doom of those who differ from us. Nay, where we know we meet with this treatment from others, let us abhor the thought of retaliating; imitating rather the conduct of our Lord, who, when he was reviled, reviled not again. Let our great policy for influencing those of other communions,

communions, be, to show forth in every thing, the meekness, the gentleness, the moderation of Christ. If attracted by that spirit which the Apostle styles, *the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind*, prevailing in the tempers and lives of our people, as the happy fruits of our teaching, candid and reasonable men shall be induced to give us the preference, the victory will be to our honour; and we are sure that the heart of the profelyte will not be corrupted by the change. We cannot say so much when men are gained to any party, by the too common arts of infusing bigotry and rancour. But still such an external connection is comparatively a small matter. Those who are not gained in this sense, may nevertheless be gained to love and purity, to more enlarged sentiments of the unbounded grace of Jesus, and thus may be improved by our example. Let us therefore invariably follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

T H E E N D.

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